# The BLUE ENVELOPE

SOPHIE KERR

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By SOPHIE KERR

WITH FRONTISPIECE IN COLORS
By FRANCES ROGERS

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## CHAPTER I

ALWAYS before this year it was off-to-boarding-school in the fall for me, after a summer spent travelling or camping or doing *something* away from home. I call it home, though it is really Mrs. Alexander's house, but she has been "father and mither and a'" to me ever since my own dear father and mother died, and she's never let me feel really orphaned, though I haven't a relative on this side of the world, but only my guardian, and though I call him Uncle Bob, he isn't my uncle but just a dear friend of my father's when they were both young. Oh, what a breathlessly long sentence!

I don't know what I would have ever done without Mrs. Alex. The gentlest woman! And the kindest and the most generous. In spite of all the money in Father's estate, she never let me pay for anything but my own personal things. She always said it made her so happy to have me with

her that money would spoil it. Yet she didn't have a great deal herself, and her house wasn't kept up so awfully well; but it was full of lovely old furniture, and there were always flowers and books, and that gave it stacks of atmosphere. Some one said once, about Mrs. Alexander, that she came of people who, for three generations at least, had eaten dinner by candle light, and somehow it expresses her. You couldn't be with her without feeling how dear she was in every way, and how she couldn't have done a mean or a little thing to save her life. She looked the way aristocrats ought to look but usually don't. And yet Mrs. Alex was as jolly as she could be, and I'd always choose to be with her rather than the girls I knew—she was such fun.

So I was awfully glad when I knew that I wasn't to go back to school that winter, and when Mrs. Alex began to talk about my début I shouted for joy. I visioned satin slippers with buckles, and bouquets of pink roses, and crowds and crowds of admiring men who would all fall in love with me! And dances! And theatre parties! And heaps of new frocks and hats! And Mrs. Alex **was** just as excited as I was.

Of course, Starboro isn't a very large city, but it has what Mrs. Alex calls a well-organized society, and that means people with big houses who know how to do things, and a country club, and a series of smart dances in the winter—and, oh, everything that the huge cities have, only on a smaller scale, but that makes it all the more fun, for everybody knows everybody else, and there's a nice friendly feeling with it all. I knew I'd have lots of affairs given for me, because Mrs. Alex and Uncle Bob are both in everything.

I was to have a white-and-silver frock, and to come out with a big dinner and dance, Mrs. Alex decided. We were even beginning to think of the decorations and the things to eat, when ziss-bang! Right up in the sky went all my lovely expectations —exploded into nothing at all.

A harmless looking little letter that the postman left one morning did it. It was a letter calling Mrs. Alex to Maine to take care of her only sister who had never been very strong, and now was ill with typhoid, if you please—dreadfully ill, too, and typhoid's a terrible thing that takes months to recover from, when you have a bad case of it. So there was no telling how long Mrs. Alex would have to stay.

The only thing to do seemed to be to close the house again and turn it over to the caretaker, and pack up and get away as quickly as possible. But that left me to be disposed of. Mrs. Alex didn't want to take me with her, for she didn't know what the conditions might be at her sister's, and with giving orders, and getting packed, and wondering what *would* be the best thing to do with me she was perfectly distracted. She thought of sending me to stay with Uncle Bob, but as she said, to turn an old bachelor's household topsyturvy by putting a frivolous little chit like me in it was downright cruelty both to bachelor and chit. It seemed almost providential when Helen and Claire Morrison came rushing in and said they had heard about Mrs. Alex going away, and their mother wanted me to come and stay with them just as long as I would do it—all winter, if I liked. Mrs. Alex hesitated a little, for she thinks the Morrisons are all rather frisky, but Helen and Claire begged so hard—and so did I—that finally she gave in.

"You can't get into a great deal of mischief in a month or two, Leslie, can you?" she said—and then we both laughed. "Besides," she went on, "Mr. Parsons is right here, and what is a guardian for

if not to guard occasionally. I'll write him a note —or call him up, and ask him to keep an eye on you. Oh, dear, I wonder if I ought to have sent you to stay with him! But it would be so dull for you—and it would so disturb his cherished quiet."

So that was how it was decided that I should go to the Morrisons'—all in a hurry and without any good reason. I'm sure Mrs. Alex kept worrying about it, and feeling not quite satisfied. Just before she left she put her arms around me, and said, "My dear, I want to say just one thing—if you're uncertain about anything, *don't do it.* That's the safest rule of life." And then she gave me a kiss and told me to write to her and tell her about all my good times with the Morrisons and to keep Uncle Bob remembering me, and then she jumped on the train and was gone.

Oh, if Mrs. Alex had known that I was going to meet Ranny Heeth, I believe she'd have let her sister have typhoid all alone, or else she would have taken me with her and set me down in that little Maine village and never taken her eyes off me. But she didn't know, so the train carried her right on, without the least hesitation, which is a habit with well-brought-up trains.

Anyway, it was heaps of fun at the Morrisons'. They have a huge house—almost more like a hotel than a house—and Mrs. Morrison is very gay, and Helen and Claire are older than I, and people simply flock around them, young people and old people, fat people and thin people, nice people and some who are—well, it's horrid for me to judge. There's always something going on, and no one's ever still a minute. If it wasn't tennis it was canoeing, and if it wasn't canoeing it was golf, and if it wasn't golf it was motoring, and if it wasn't motoring it was dancing or eating or tea-ing, or something where there could be a crowd and every one having a good time. It was so different from the way Mrs. Alex and I live that I adored it. I wore an evening dress every night to dinner and did my hair in a new way every week. Thank heaven, my hair is curly!

Indeed, I didn't regret my lost début very much, for this was just as good. All the men in the younger set came to the Morrisons', and ever so many besides, and of course, if the men came, all the girls came, too. So I met every one, and it was awfully strange to see some of them that I'd almost forgotten, and just vaguely remembered from kindergarten days. It's so funny to have some

one bring up and introduce very politely some great tall fellow—"Mr. Hathaway" or "Mr. Smithers," and when you take a good look at him—good heavens, it's Tommy Hathaway or Billie Smithers, that used to fold tissue paper baskets right beside you in kindergarten! I had a lot of amusing meetings like that—I didn't know that my infantile acquaintance had been so large.

Of all the boys who came to see Claire and Helen, or who hung around the house just because every one else did, the one they were the most crazy about was Ranny Heeth. He was the oldest of the crowd—a regular man of the world. He had the dearest little red racing car, and he played tennis and golf and danced and did everything just a little bit better than any one else. Every one said he was "wild," but no one minded in the Morrison crowd. And he had a horrid family, a dreadful old politician father who was some sort of a boss and was always talked about when reformers made campaign speeches, and his mother and sisters were the most showy, ordinary sort of people. The Morrisons said that Ranny was different from his family, and he certainly *was*.

I had been at the Morrisons' more than two

weeks before I met him, for he had been away somewhere—at some motor races, I think. But one afternoon he came dashing up in his car, just at tea-time, and the girls were in a perfect flutter when they saw who it was. When he was introduced to me, he looked at me rather strangely, I thought, and asked my name again to be sure. Then he said, laughingly, "This is the place for me," and sat down beside me. And there he stayed for the rest of his call.

I don't believe I had known Ranny Heeth an hour before he invited me to go out in his car. Claire and Helen were furious. They had never been asked to go. And that was only the beginning. He came to see me every single day, and sent me flowers and candy, and taught me new steps and, oh, well—did everything that a man who is in love with a girl does to show her that he is. In a week he had stopped calling me Miss Brennan, and just said Leslie—and I called him Ranny, too.

It was my first real "rush" and I enjoyed it all the more, I'm ashamed to say, because it made Claire and Helen so wild. They couldn't understand why he had passed them by for me, and they almost said so. I didn't blame them for

wondering, for they were both heaps prettier than I, with so much more colour and style and so much go. But when I said something like that to Ranny, he just laughed, and said they looked like a pair of parrakeets.

"And what kind of a bird do I resemble, then?" I asked, with as much dignity as I could muster.

He looked down at my dress—I was wearing blue. "The bluebird—for happiness—my happiness—I hope," he said, with a deep little thrill in his voice—and I felt the thrill, too. I didn't ask any more questions about ornithology.

It was strange, the way I felt about Ranny Heeth. He wasn't so awfully good looking, and he wasn't very clever—about books and pictures and music and a lot of the things Mrs. Alex and I cared about. Why, he'd never even heard of Yeats—but he was—fascinating somehow. I think it was because he was always so sure of himself. He always knew what he wanted and he never hesitated and got awkward and *gauche* in a social emergency as the other boys did. He was equal to any situation.

Sometimes, when I was away from him, I thought that I didn't like him at all—that he almost bored

me. But when he'd come, I'd be just as silly about him as Claire and Helen were. I didn't feel that it was silly, either, because—he really was in earnest. Every one saw that.

Little by little the feeling that at times I did not like him wore away and I did not think of him in any way except eagerly. I liked him—so much! He was so attentive—so thoughtful for me. I don't believe any man in the world could think of so many nice little things to do for a girl as Ranny Heeth could. We went out together every day in his little car, and every evening he was at the house. Sometimes we'd go out in the country and have dinner together—darling little dinners, with just us two at the table. That was such fun. I'd never dined alone with a man before.

It was just four weeks from the day I met him that Randall Heeth proposed to me. I was so happy. He said he had cared everything for me from the first instant he saw me, and certainly his actions proved it. He urged me to set the wedding day very, very soon—but how could I with Mrs. Alex away? It was unthinkable that I could plan anything so important as my wedding without her. No, not even for Ranny!

And now I must confess a strange thing—I had never written a word to Mrs. Alex about Ranny. I had felt—somehow—that she'd better hear about him from my own lips and I kept hoping that her sister would get well and she'd come back. I knew she'd like Ranny instantly if she saw him, for no one could help it; but I thought she might get some sort of foolish prejudice against him if I tried to tell her in a letter. There was his family, for instance. Mrs. Alex would never have been able to stand them, and if I told her about them, she'd think Ranny was like them. Mrs. Alex is awfully strong for good family.

With Ranny urging me so sweetly and so earnestly to set the wedding day, however, and my not knowing when Mrs. Alex would be back, I was in a dilemma. But at last a perfectly splendid idea came to me: I'd go down and see Uncle Bob and tell *him*. He had not been living up to his duties as guardian at all, I decided, and now he should have a chance to do something for me, for if he liked Ranny, and of course he would, Mrs. Alex would be sure to like him, too.

It was a heavenly afternoon in late October when I went down to see Uncle Bob. I did hope he'd be in one of his pleasant moods, for though he's a

darling old thing, he's very, very old-fashioned in his notions, and sometimes very grouchy. Still, with a little wheedling, I can almost always bring him round, but it's easier to find him amiable, and not have to bother to do the wheedling.

Ranny took me down to Uncle Bob's office in his car and said he'd wait for me, and I must not be long. Whereupon I asked him if he thought he was going to order me around like that, and he said he expected to be a perfect tyrant, and to beat me when I didn't obey him, and we got to laughing so over that I almost fell out of the car. I left him at the curbstone and waved my hand as I got into the elevator. But when I got up to Uncle Bob's office, provokingly enough he had some one with him, in the inner room marked "Private." I had to sit down in the outer office with Miss Winch, Uncle Bob's secretary, a quiet girl who always wears the plainest shirtwaists and skirts, but who always looks nice. She was taking notes from a great pile of books, the dullest old things I ever saw.

I fidgeted around and looked at my wrist watch and fingered my lovely white jade pendant that I'd put on a scarlet silk cord, and pulled my fur about and finally I said to Miss Winch:

"It's forever-and-ever-amen to wait, isn't it?"

She looked up and smiled comfortingly and said, "Oh, it's only old Mr. Johnston—he never stays very long."

And then she went on making notes again. I watched her as long as I could and then I asked her: "Do you like to do what you're doing, Miss Winch? It looks so stupid and dull."

Miss Winch smiled again, a funny little smile, and she said: "When you work for your living, Miss Leslie, you've got to do a lot of dull and stupid things along with the interesting ones."

"I shouldn't think working for your living was ever interesting," I said, before I thought.

Miss Winch laughed now—a chuckly laugh, as if something amused her very much. "It's interesting to eat, isn't it?" she said, "and to have a comfortable room to live in, and to have clothes to wear? And that's what all these stupid things provide me with. Besides, when Mr. Parsons is working on a big case like this one, it's fine to think that some one of these little notes I'm making may be the very thing he'll need to help him win."

I certainly was surprised to hear Miss Winch talk like that—she'd always seemed to me a quiet,

mousy person without a bit of animation, and I'd always felt sorry for her because she couldn't have any of the fun that girls have who don't have to work. I began to revise my opinion, but I didn't get very far, for just then the voices in the inner office stopped, and Uncle Bob and old Mr. Johnston came out. I got up and bowed distantly to Uncle Bob, as if I was a perfect stranger.

"How do you do, Mr. Parsons," I said, "I've come to see you on a matter of grave importance." Just like a client, you know.

Uncle Bob looked tickled, and yet grave, too. He shook hands with old Mr. Johnston, and then ushered me back into the inner office and closed the door behind us.

"I'm glad you came to-day, Leslie," he said, "I was just on the point of sending for you. I have something to tell you which I am afraid you will not find very pleasant."

Oh, my gracious—my mind gave an awful jump. Of course, I thought he meant the bill for my fur—it *was* an extravagance. And I had forgotten all about that he might be cross about it, because being engaged to Ranny was so much more exciting and important.

"Oh, Uncle Bob," I cried, "I know it was an awful price, but do look at it—it's the loveliest silver fox you ever saw! They said at the shop it was the finest skin they'd had in years. I'll be very economical all the rest of the month to make up. Truly. I promise."

"I know all about your promises of economy," said Uncle Bob with a quite unnecessary emphasis. "You don't know the first letter of the word. However, I didn't want to speak about the fur. Sit down, Leslie, and listen, please."

I sat down, simply wondering myself into a hundred thousand question marks. I couldn't think of anything else he might be cross about—no, not a thing. Meanwhile, Uncle Bob rustled through some papers on his desk, and finally put them down and looked across at me.

"You know," he began solemnly, "that when your father died he made me the sole trustee of his estate with power to administer it as I saw fit, and also to have full and complete guardianship over you, his only child. Your father, as you also know, left certain plans for your education and maintenance which I have endeavoured to carry out, ably and sympathetically assisted, I may say, by Mrs. Alex-

ander. In two days you will be nineteen—and now we come to the gist of the matter. Your father wished you, at the age of nineteen, if you were not engaged to be married, to learn some wage-earning occupation and become self-supporting for a period of not less than two years."

I was absolutely breathless with astonishment. It seemed so strange—so fantastic. I could hardly believe that I'd been hearing rightly. "Why—why! . . . Say it over again, please, Uncle Bob," I begged him, "I can't take it in at all."

"Your father wished," said poor Uncle Bob, oh, so patiently, "that if you reached the age of nineteen without being engaged to be married, you should learn some wage-earning occupation and earn your own living for at least two years thereafter."

I sat still and tried, the best I could, to comprehend it. The more I thought about it, the stranger it seemed to me. "Father must have had some reason for wanting me to do this, mustn't he, Uncle Bob?" I asked at last. "Do you know that reason? If you do—won't you tell it to me?"

Uncle Bob got up and looked out of the window. He loved Father so dearly that he can never talk about him without being affected by it. And now

he had to blink his eyes and clear his throat—hard—before he could speak. "Your father," he began slowly, "wanted you to know something more of life than just—froth. He wanted you to—to understand the people who must make their own way and who shoulder hard responsibilities. He thought that you should learn to do just as they do. He wanted you to—I use his own words—'eat the bread you have earned, to know how much you are worth to the world in actual dollars and cents, to be among people who work, not as an observer, but as a fellow worker.' That was his idea, and I put it before you just as he expressed it."

There was another silence. It all seemed so strange to me—as if, somehow, Father himself were alive and had spoken to me. He had wanted me to work—to learn to do something that was worth payment in actual dollars and cents—ah, but provided I didn't marry, or wasn't engaged to be married. It came to me with a start that I had absolutely forgotten Ranny and the reason that I had come down to Uncle Bob's office. But now I remembered—both of them.

"You—you haven't asked me why I came to see you to-day," I said, not knowing exactly how to

begin my story. "I—I came to tell you—well, it makes father's plan impossible—for, you see—Uncle Bob—*I am engaged!*"

Uncle Bob swung around from the window as if I had hit him with something. He didn't blink his eyes or clear his throat now. He was all the severe guardian.

"Engaged!" he snapped—oh, how he snapped! "What nonsense is this! A child like you! And to whom, I should like to know?"

It was always very much easier for me to talk to him when he was snappish than when he is serious and sweet, so I wasn't at all alarmed or put out by his barking.

"If you'll come to the window and stand on your tippy toes and look down, you can just see the top of his head," I said naughtily, "for he's waiting for me down there in his car, and probably is very impatient because I'm staying so long. It's—Ranny Heeth."

Uncle Bob went perfectly wild. Never, never have I seen him so black angry. I realized that I was in for a time of it.

"If you're joking, Leslie," he said, and his voice was as hard as steel, "it is a very poor joke,

indeed. You cannot seriously consider engaging yourself to a dissipated, worthless waster like Randall Heeth, to say nothing of the fact that his family is not only common but notorious. I had no idea that Mrs. Alexander permitted you to meet young men of his type——"

"Oh, she doesn't!" I said. "You forget that Mrs. Alex is away up in Maine nursing her sister, and that I'm staying at the Morrisons'. And you'd better be careful what you say, Uncle Bob. You don't think I'm going to sit about meekly and let you and Mrs. Alex pick me out a—a husband, do you? Why, you'd pick out a—a minister—or a funny little prize boy like Wilbur Allen, or—or something like that. You seem to forget that I'm all grown up now and have tastes and preferences of my own. Come, do be nice. Ranny's a dear when you know him." I went over and tucked my arm into his and rubbed my cheek ever so gently against his shoulder. "Can't I blandish you into being nice?" I asked.

He drew away from me—it was evident that he wasn't going to be blandished a bit this time. He walked up and down a time or two and then sat down at his desk, evidently considering the thing

carefully. It was funny for me to watch him, and I couldn't help being amused, for he *is* a darling old grouch—I don't believe he can help it. I've always wondered how it was that my dear gay Irish father could have cared so much for Uncle Bob, but I dare-say when he was younger he was more human and lovable. And while I was thinking about that he began to speak in a sort of red-hot, ice-cold tone, like a burning icicle, if there could be such a thing.

"Listen to me, Leslie," he said. "If you marry Randall Heeth, you will not receive the bulk of your father's estate until you are twenty-five years old. In the meantime, I have the power, which I shall use, to give you a minimum allowance of ten dollars a week. I want you to tell young Heeth this, and see what he says. You understand me—only ten dollars a week from now on if you persist in this affair."

Oh, I was angry clear through and through. It seemed to me I fairly seethed with rage. "Do you really mean, Uncle Bob," I asked, "that you would let me have only ten miserable little dollars a week for six years? And when it's all really my own money?"

"I mean exactly that."

"And why," I went on, "do you want me to tell this to Ranny? Do you think that it will make any difference to him?"

"I think," said Uncle Bob, nastily, "that it will make a very great difference to him. I happen to know that he needs money very badly just now, so badly that he evidently is willing to marry for it, even though he won't work for it."

"It's not true!" I said. "I never heard anything so—so infamous in my life. I should think you'd be ashamed to say such things. It's not true! It's not true!"

"Leslie," said Uncle Bob, looking at me so sternly that I could hardly face him, "have I ever told you a lie?"

"Not till now," I said, as hatefully as I could, "but I know that what you are saying about Ranny is not true. Every one says horrid things about him just because he's been a little wild. I tell you I like him a million times better than any milk-and-water theological student that you think would be such a model husband for me. I like a man with some go—and some spirit."

"You haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about," said Uncle Bob, "but—well, I stand

by my word. Ten dollars a week until you're twenty-five. If you can't live on that, you had better get married at once and let your spirited husband support you."

I got up from my chair and I dropped him a deep curtsy. "Thank you for your kind advice," I said. "I shall take it." I picked up my gloves and bag and made a perfectly magnificent exit, at least it would have been if I hadn't banged the door and run as hard as I could go through the outer office into the hall to the elevator. I didn't even nod good-bye to Miss Winch, who looked up with her eyebrows arched as I came through like a whirlwind. I flung myself into the elevator and the instant it reached the first floor I jumped out of it and through the revolving door and across the pavement and into Ranny's little racer before he knew I was coming.

Naturally he looked round in some surprise. "What ho!" he said. "Why the mad haste?"

I couldn't tell him there. "Let's get out into the country, and I'll tell you everything," I answered.

"At Your Majesty's service," he said, and threw in the clutch.

## CHAPTER II

THE car pulled slowly away from the curb, and then, with the siren shrieking, Ranny let her out as he loves to do and we flew down the street, just missing by an inch the people at the crossings and the other cars, and passing everything that was going our way. Ranny could drive as well as a professional—better than a good many of them.

I pulled my tight little hat still tighter on my head and clasped my silver fox up around my throat and then I braced myself and just gave myself up to the pleasure of feeling the speed-wind beat against me. It was glorious, but yet I couldn't enjoy it as I usually did for I was too hurt and mad with Uncle Bob. As soon as we got out into the country—the real country, that is, I leaned over and screamed into Ranny's ear, "Slow up a little, Ranny dear. I shall fly to pieces if I don't tell you all about it this minute."

Ranny slowed, and we ran lazily along the wind-

ing, dipping sunny country road. It was a heavenly day—as warm and bright as if it was midsummer. I don't think I shall ever forget that.

Ranny waited for me to begin, and then I found that I didn't know what I wanted to tell first—there was so much, and I was so furious.

"You'd never believe what Uncle Bob said," I began. "I'll never forgive him, Ranny, never. He was so unreasonable—and so arbitrary, and so—yes, so downright mean."

"I'm going to stop a minute and light another cig," said Ranny, and so we stopped while he got out his cigarette case and his matches. He cupped his hands around the match flare, while I watched him, for I always liked to see him do it, and then he blew a long puff of blue smoke and tossed the match away. "Well, what did the old gink say?" he asked.

"Uncle Bob said," I told him, "that if I married you he'd not let me have any of my money, my own money, mind you, until I was twenty-five years old, and in the meantime, he'd allow me only a horrid, beggarly ten dollars a week for myself!"

Ranny's hand fell away from his cigarette, and he looked round at me dazedly. "Wha-what?" he stammered.

"Isn't that the meanest thing you ever heard of?" I asked, for I thought he was just astonished. "I never knew Uncle Bob to speak so disagreeably about anything before, and I've had scoldings enough for one thing and another before this, goodness knows. Ranny, he was just—hateful! I told him I couldn't live on ten dollars a week—and he advised me, in the most sneering way, to get married and let my husband support me. And, Ranny, that made me so *enraged* that I just dropped him a polite curtsy, and said, 'So I shall,' and went out and slammed the door. I didn't mean to slam the door, but when I took hold of it I felt so *slammy* that it went bang before I could stop it."

Ranny didn't laugh as he usually did at my nonsense, and yet he didn't seem at all responsively indignant. He was—queer. Somehow the way he looked made me feel queer, too. So I went on talking, very fast, to hide what I was feeling.

"Of course I know," I said, "that my not having the money makes no difference to you."

Ranny was fumbling with his cigarette—it had gone out, but he didn't seem to be able to think of getting out his matchbox and lighting it again. He didn't look at me. It gave me a feeling as if

some one had laid a cold finger on my heart. I had to ask him. I said sharply:

"*Does it?*"

Ranny seemed to come out of profound meditation. He did not look at me even now. He threw his cigarette away, and took hold of the steering wheel, and started the car going slowly. "Why, no, no—of course, it doesn't," he said at last, "and I don't believe old Parsons is on the level. What you want to do is to get a good smart young lawyer and find out exactly what's what. He may be just throwing a great big bluff, and if you went after him good and hard you might be able to make him give up right away."

"Oh-h," I gasped, "I couldn't do that, Ranny. Uncle Bob was Father's dearest friend, and he wouldn't tell me a lie to save his life. If he says I can't have my money—it's true. He'd have all the laws and courts to back him up if he said anything like that. But what—what difference does the money make, anyway?" (How my cheeks burned when I asked that.)

Ranny didn't act a bit like himself. He looked sullen—and impatient. "Well, hang it," he burst out at last, "we've got to live, haven't we? I sup-

pose the old man will put up for me as long as I stay at home—I can always get round Mother anyway—but I don't know what either of 'em would say if I wanted to get married and bring a wife there."

I felt as if the whole world had suddenly tumbled down in pieces and as if I was caught under it. But I couldn't think that Ranny meant what he had just been saying, I *couldn't*. A man who lives on his wife's money, here in America at least, is the very lowest thing that breathes! My heart seemed pounding a hole in my side, and my breath didn't seem to come right; at last I heard myself saying, just as if I were listening to a stranger: "Do you mean that your father is willing to support you, but that he wouldn't want to support me—if we were married? Is that really—what you mean, Ranny?"

His face got still more sullen and scowling. "Why," he said, jerking out the words, "of course—I supposed—you know, that you'd have plenty—and——"

"But, Ranny," I broke in, "you—you might get something to do, you know. It couldn't take—so very much for us to live on, if we live simply. I'd not be wasteful, truly. It would be ever and ever so much better if we could have a little place of our

own—even if it wasn't—expensive—or pretentious —at first. It truly wouldn't take very much."

I put my hand on his arm. I was pleading with him to spare me what I knew inside of me I'd got to face. I felt that I couldn't bear it—I couldn't bear it.

"Oh, yes," Ranny answered me in such a sneering, taunting voice, "I know all about that sort of thing. We'd live in some hole of a tenement, in three rooms, probably, and you'd do the cooking and I'd go to work every morning with a tin dinner pail, I suppose, wearing overalls and smoking a pipe. That's a fine idea, that is."

He turned and looked at me now, and for the first time I saw him exactly as he was—selfish and cruel and common—and suddenly I knew, too, that I had never been in love with him and couldn't possibly be. He was no more the Ranny Heeth I thought he was than night is day. It shook me to my soul.

"Stop the car," I said.

He looked at me stupidly. "What's the idea?" he asked.

"You stop this car," I said again. And then he did it.

"What's the idea?" he repeated.

I didn't answer until I stood on the ground. Then I gripped my hands together and took a deep breath.

"I just want to tell you," I said, "that I utterly detest and despise you, Randall Heeth. I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth and the only one. I'll walk back to town rather than ride with you, and I don't want you ever to speak to me again as long as you live."

With that I turned my back and walked away. He began to say something, but I don't know what, for I didn't wait to hear. And then he started his car, and more quickly than I can tell it, it was gone, like a red streak in the sunlight.

Well, I stopped and looked after him, but in a moment there was nothing to see but a cloud of dust. I could hardly trust my own senses—I could hardly think it was real at all. He was gone —Ranny—my ardent lover, who only yesterday had sworn that I was the only thing on earth he cared for. He was *gone*. He had not loved me at all. Had he only wanted to marry me because of the money he thought I had? Was he really that sort of a man? A man who would pretend to care for a girl and make love to her—for *money?* It was

the first time that anything coldly mercenary had ever touched me, and it made me feel afraid—a very small frail thing in a world where unthinkable baseness masked itself as something fine and beautiful and nearly, very nearly, seized you. I could feel the tears close behind my eyes. Such bitter, scalding tears. And then I—well, I threw back my head and I *laughed*—laughed as hard as I could and spoke out loud in the still sunshine.

"I'll laugh," I said. "I'll laugh at everything! I won't be such a silly as to cry about a *pig* like Ranny Heeth." And I set my chin obstinately and began to walk as fast as I could.

It was a lonesome little road, not travelled very much I suppose, for I didn't meet a soul, and soon I began to wish that I had quarrelled with Ranny nearer to town, for I couldn't get on very fast in thin, high-heeled pumps. I wished desperately that some one would come by whom I could ask for a lift. My feet ached—and my head ached—and my heart ached the worst of all. It did seem as if too many things were happening all at once—and not at *all* as I expected.

In spite of all my various aches, however, it wasn't such an unpleasant walk, only I was far

from being in the mood to appreciate properly the purple asters and the crimsoned sumach and the warm October haze that hung over everything. Somehow the beauties of nature were about the last things to appeal to me at that time. I tramped along very determinedly, and finally I reached a crossroads and heard the rattle and bang of a far-off trolley car. Then I saw those blessed old ugly trolley poles and the grubby little shed station, and I ran for it. Luckily for me, the car was going into town, not out, and I climbed aboard thankfully.

I say thankfully, and of course I was thankful, and less forlorn, after I'd found that trolley, but all the time I wouldn't have cared if the car had run away into the wilderness and taken me and all my hurt and humiliation with it. "I wouldn't even care if it ran off the track and I got all smashed up," I thought drearily. Here was I, Leslie Brennan, only an hour ago a very happy, care-free person, without a real trouble in the world, engaged to the most attractive, run-after man—oh, when I thought of Ranny how I wanted to cry, only I wouldn't—and now! If only Mrs. Alex had been at home I would have gone to her and told her everything and she'd have planned something to

ease my miserable feelings and she'd have told me what to do, and she'd have mothered me and petted me and helped me—— Oh, I was so sorry for myself and I did so want to cry. Yes, I wanted to cry, and I wanted to scream and kick and bang things around, too, and hurt somebody the way I had been hurt. Ranny by preference. How I did wish that some one would do something as mean and horrible to him as he had done to me.

And now came the question—what was I going to do? All my beautiful dreams were shattered, absolutely. Not a single glittering bit remained of them. And then—then, I thought of Uncle Bob. Good heavens, this meant that I'd have to follow Father's plans for me—that I'd have to learn some tiresome, miserable old work, and drudge for two long years. That was just the last touch of unfairness, it seemed to me. It meant giving up my début, and all my good times and my youth. No, it *wasn't* fair, and it wasn't right, even if my dear Father did plan it. He didn't know how things were going to be with me. With all the money he'd left there wasn't the slightest need of my making a drudge of myself, and I couldn't see why he had ever thought up such a wild, preposterous scheme.

Of all the things in the world that I didn't want to do, learning to support myself and working for a living was the very last. How was I going to go about it? It seemed so dull, so dreary, such an utterly hopeless outlook—and for me, especially, for I do so *love* good times.

If that old trolley car had been able to appreciate what a load of glooms and forebodings it was carrying it would have stopped right on its tracks and refused to go a step farther. Still, it didn't, but kept buzzing along, not very fast, to be sure, but steadily getting nearer to town with every turn of its grumbling wheels. Its monotonous rumble and rush soothed me a little bit, I think. At any rate, I got so I could think more clearly.

Then slowly, slowly, out of the hurly-burly of worrying, dismal thoughts that were tearing my poor head apart, I began to see that the only fair and square thing to do was to go straight back to Uncle Bob and tell him the truth about Ranny. I hated to do it—I felt as though I couldn't, possibly, no, not to save my life; but, on the other hand, it simply wasn't right to do anything else. That was flat.

I argued myself round and round and round a

hundred times before I finally made up my mind that I must do it. The bumpy little old trolley was almost at the town square before I decided, honest true; but as a last sop to my pride I worked out a plan of telling Uncle Bob about Ranny so very gaily and flippantly that he would never guess how torn and bleeding my feelings were inside. I thought I owed myself that much satisfaction—it wasn't much.

As soon as I got off the trolley I went straight to Uncle Bob's office, for it didn't seem worth while to waste any time in dreading it. There was Miss Winch, still making notes out of those same big law books—why, it seemed endless years since I'd been there and seen her doing it! It didn't seem as if it could be possible that it was that very same afternoon. And she looked up at me and said, just as unconcernedly, "Oh, Miss Leslie, wait a moment, please. Mr. Parsons wants to see you."

Now, wasn't that odd! Had Uncle Bob been so sure that I would come back? I didn't ask, I just dropped in a dispirited little heap into the same armchair I had fidgeted about in earlier in the day, and there I waited while she told Uncle Bob I had come.

"You're to go right in, please," she said.

With all the strength I had left I pulled myself together, and walked in as coolly as I could. Uncle Bob was there, sitting behind his big flat desk, just as I had left him. I sat down before the desk and smiled at him cheerfully. At least I made my lips smile. I'm afraid my eyes didn't.

"Well, Uncle Bob," I said saucily, "you were quite right about Ranny—isn't it the funniest thing you ever heard!" And then it was all no use. I put my head down on the desk and began to cry just as hard as I could cry. I simply howled! I cried so hard that it was quite a while before I could feel the contrite pats Uncle Bob was bestowing on my back, and when I finally could hear something besides my own sobs he was saying disjointedly:

" . . . blame myself severely for speaking to you as I did . . . should have remembered your youth . . . so many things to worry and harass me. . . . My dear child, that young whelp isn't worth a thought, much less your tears . . . cannot bear to see you suffer. . . . He ought to be horsewhipped. . . . Do, do, my dear Leslie, try to stop crying . . . you distress me beyond words."

And the next thing I was leaning against his shoulder and talking just the same way. . . . "I was going to be so brave and carry it off so well . . . wasn't going to let you see how I felt . . . I don't know what makes me cry so, Uncle Bob. . . . I don't really care as much as I sound . . . only Ranny is so different from what I thought he was . . . and I was so disappointed . . . and ashamed . . . how could I ever have thought I was in love with him . . . and I'm so silly . . ."

After some more of this mutual explanation and self-accusation we both felt heaps better. I got up and bathed my eyes, and Uncle Bob held a glass of ice water for me to drink as if I were a baby, and put a hard leather pillow off his settee behind my back, where it was most uncomfortable, but he meant it so kindly I leaned against it and never said a word except thanks. And after we were calmed down we talked it out plainly.

I told him all about what I had said to Ranny and how Ranny had acted. "So I'm not engaged, now, Uncle Bob," I wound up, "and I think perhaps I might like to earn my living after I learn how. But, please, do let's pick out something for me to

do that doesn't take awfully long to learn—I don't want any four-year courses of things, for you see, if I studied for four years, and then earned my own living for two years more, I'd be twenty-six—almost too old ever to enjoy anything again."

Uncle Bob smiled and patted me some more. "When you are fifty-eight, Leslie," he said, "twenty-six will seem fairly young to you, I think. But from the viewpoint of almost-nineteen I suppose it may appear to be quite middle-aged."

"Not quite middle-aged," I said, "but anyway, getting serious and stiffy and not liking to dance and fly about so much. And I hate to lose six whole years right out of my life, like this."

"Are you so sure they are going to be lost?" asked Uncle Bob, looking at me with a Sunday-school-teachery look.

"Yes, I am, as sure as I can be," I answered firmly. "Absolutely lost. So let's choose something that takes only a year or two to learn, for every day I rescue from this earning-your-own-living scheme is very much to be desired, I'll tell you that. I do wish I were clever; then I'd be able to do almost anything without having to spend a lot of time learning how. But I don't know enough

to be a teacher, or to be a cook, either, for that matter. And I don't think I'd like to work in a store, Uncle Bob. And I'd hate to be a trained nurse—I can't bear smelly disinfectants—it takes four years of getting ready, anyway. But say—why couldn't I—why couldn't I learn stenography and typewriting and go and be a secretary to somebody—like Miss Winch is to you? She's so nice and looks so attractive in those tailored white blouses, and when I was talking to her about working she said it wasn't bad at all. It doesn't seem such an awfully hard kind of work—Father didn't want me to learn such an *awfully* hard kind of work, do you think, Uncle Bob?"

"You don't need to make your decision to-day, Leslie," said Uncle Bob. "We'll talk it over in a day or two when you feel better and have got back your mental poise."

Of course, I haven't any "mental poise" to lose or to get back, but nevertheless Uncle Bob's words were a great comfort. Then something else unpleasant occurred to my mind—just as if enough unpleasant things had not occurred that day.

"I do wish," I said, "that I needn't go back to the Morrisons'. Claire and Helen will know that

something's happened between Ranny and me and they'll ask so many questions, and I don't feel what you might call composed yet. It's been—a day!"

Uncle Bob banged the desk top with his hand and made the inkwells jump.

"I very much prefer that you should *not* return to the Morrisons'," he said with considerable emphasis. "If Mrs. Morrison's discretion were only equal to her social standing!" he stopped and shook his head. "My dear, I shall take you home with me, and you shall stay there until we hear from Mrs. Alexander and you have decided what is best for you to do."

So that is the way it was settled. Uncle Bob got his hat and stick and I pulled my veil over my face, for my eyes were red, and I'm afraid my nose was red, too.

"Exit Leslie, the butterfly, and enter Leslie, the poor working girl," I said to Uncle Bob as we left the office.

## CHAPTER III

UNCLE BOB'S house was a peaceful haven of rest. He has such quiet old servants who move silently and think of everything you could possibly want long before you can think of it yourself. The walls of all the rooms are so high and the furniture so dark and mellow and the lights so shaded and the chairs so deliciously comfortable that it made me think of the men's clubs when you peep into their big windows in the early evening. I didn't do very much at first but sleep a good bit and have my breakfast in bed, then read a little, or take a walk where I wouldn't be likely to meet any one I knew, and just before dinner I'd go down to Uncle Bob's office and come home with him. Oh, I loved it there—for a few days.

But it was too radical a change after the Morrisons' with all the gay times and the crowds of people coming and going, and no sooner was I over the worst of feeling sore and sorry about Ranny than

I began to be restless. What now—what now? I kept asking myself. And I longed again for dear Mrs. Alex to come back and help me straighten myself out, for indeed I felt terribly snarled up with life. I just couldn't get over the shock and the disgust I felt in knowing about Ranny. I made up my mind—hard—that I wouldn't be sorry for myself that I'd lost a man such as he'd proved himself to be, and I didn't allow myself to think of him an instant. If I found myself grieving and regretting all his nice little ways, and the love he had pretended to have for me, I reminded myself that it was all pretence, and that I ought to be glad that he'd been shown up in time. Oh, what would I ever have done if I had married him, and he had not known he could not get my money until too late! It made me feel sick all over just to imagine it.

Yet for all my good resolutions and in spite of my knowing that he was horrid and not fit for any girl to notice, sometimes I missed him dreadfully. He did know how to surround you with attention and make you feel that he cared—even though he didn't. Yes, I missed all that, I couldn't help it, yet when I felt myself missing him, I was humiliated and

ashamed. What a little, vain, ridiculous fool I'd been! How easily deceived. These were not pleasant thoughts to think alone.

Just when I was beginning to feel that another day of the utter quiet at Uncle Bob's would drive me into hysterics, again the unexpected happened. Mrs. Alex, who had been writing quite cheerfully about her sister's recovery, now wrote that some complications had arisen and that it would be months and months and months before she could possibly be well. Mrs. Alex said that she knew that her duty was with her sister and that she would take her South for the winter, to a sanitarium—but *what* would become of me? That was again her worry. She wrote to Uncle Bob and me, both by the same mail, and we exchanged letters while we were having breakfast—French crescents and marmalade. (The eats at Uncle Bob's were always delicious.)

After we had each read our own letters, and then each other's, we sat and looked at each other over the marmalade jar.

"Now's the moment to break it to her," I said. "Write and tell her that I'm going into a business career and she need worry about me no more.

And I'll write, too, and explain that if she ever needs a private secretary she will find me a competent and able young person."

I had better confess that I didn't feel half as gay as I talked. I felt like nothing so much as a nice little house cat who has always had a cozy place by the hearth and a pink ribbon and lots of cream, and is suddenly commanded to become a large and efficient and self-sustaining watchdog. I wasn't in the least interested in being a business woman. I had rather snobbish feelings about girls who worked, and also, away down deep inside of me, there was a horrible suspicion that even though I had looked down on them and felt superior, I might easily turn out to be a great deal less efficient than the most of these girls on whom I looked down. There was Miss Winch, for example. I had prided myself on being "pleasant" to her whenever I happened to be in Uncle Bob's office, but in honesty I had to admit that she could do millions of things that I didn't believe I could ever even learn. And it was suddenly borne in on me that Miss Winch instead of being pleased by my patronizing little "pleasant" speeches, regarded me as an empty-headed, useless creature, to whom she in turn was "pleasant" more

out of pity than respect. It may have been good for my soul for me to realize all this, but it was most decidedly uncomfortable.

Along with all these horrid feelings, I felt that my father shouldn't have demanded that I earn my own living and I was resentful that Uncle Bob thought he was right and insisted that I carry out the provisions of the will. Oh, dear—those were the most unhappy days I ever spent. I tried to hide my thoughts and feelings from Uncle Bob, but being a lawyer, I guess he could tell how I felt, for lawyers are perfectly uncanny about knowing what is in your mind before you say a word. At least Uncle Bob is.

On one thing I stood out, and was very firm, and that was that I should not have to learn my work and then go to work right here at home in Starboro. It took considerable argument, but at last Uncle Bob gave in that I might go to New York, for I told him, at last, "I'll rebel. I won't even try to learn anything if I must stir up all this comment and gossip here in town among the people who know who I am."

"You're very foolish to look at it that way, Leslie," said Uncle Bob, "and very self-conscious.

People won't pay half as much attention to you as you think. There might be a little ripple of talk, but it would soon be past. I would very much prefer that you stay here."

At that I burst into floods of tears and I just raved. I declared that I wouldn't stay in Starboro, that Uncle Bob hadn't the slightest idea of what a girl's feelings might be, that he wanted to make things as difficult for me as he could—oh, I said heaps of things that were not true, of course, but in my state of mind, seemed true. I asked him if he was trying to make things as hard as he could for me when they were hard enough anyway, and finally, he gave in.

First, though, he wrote to Mrs. Alex to find out what she thought. Heaven bless her, she stood by me, and it was finally decided as I wished. I had to promise to go to one of the boarding-houses on a list that Uncle Bob got together for me. He wouldn't hear of my trying any of the studio clubs —I was crazy to go to one of them that I'd read about—and I wouldn't go to the Y. W. C. A. So we compromised on these boarding-houses.

Now appeared a new difficulty—to me at least.

When everything else was pretty well arranged,

and I was just beginning to look forward a little bit to going away, I had another session with Uncle Bob.

"You are to have," he announced, "fifteen dollars a week to live on until you are able to begin earning money. Your tuition at the business school will be paid, but that is all. Out of the fifteen dollars you will have to pay for your board, clothes, laundry, and all of your incidental expenses. As soon as you get a position you will receive only five dollars a week, which amount represented to your father an equivalent of living-at-home, which helps out the average small-salaried girl."

And my personal allowance, until now, had been fifty dollars a week, and there were lots of extra bills that Uncle Bob had always paid without a murmur—or at least, with a murmur! How could I do it! If I had been clever at arithmetic and had known a lot about economy it wouldn't have seemed so impossible to me, but as it was I thought of that fifteen dollars and my heart went down in my boots—yes, into the very soles of my boots. Then something I had heard Ranny Heeth say to another fellow flashed into my head. Ranny had said: "Brace up! Be a sport!" It fitted my case per-

fectly. I'd try it out. I'd be a sport. But nevertheless, it was a very sober, scared Leslie Brennan who got on that New York express and waved good-bye to Uncle Bob. It was a satisfaction to me to see that he looked sober and scared, too.

It is all day and overnight from Starboro to New York, so that I had plenty of time to think on the way, for there wasn't any one interesting even to look at on the train except one chubby baby—and its mother was so homely and I felt that the baby was going to grow up to look like its mother, so *that* wasn't the comfort that babies usually are. There was a disagreeable woman who wanted the windows down, and all the ventilators shut, and there were some men who played cards and wrangled over every hand. I had plenty of chance to sort and arrange and get my mind in order.

The sum and substance of all my hard thinking wasn't very much. One thing only seemed perfectly clear, and that was that Leslie Brennan, on her way to New York to earn her own living, was a very different person from Leslie Brennan who had so looked forward to a début and pink roses and satin slippers with buckles only a little while ago. I felt years older—I even looked in the glass to see if I

had aged—but I suppose I hadn't, for the waiter in the diner asked me sternly, "Ain't yo' maw or yo' paw or nobody wid yo'?" when I went in for my first meal there. When I told him I was travelling alone he looked out for me and advised me what to eat and shooed people away from my table as if he was my nurse. And the disagreeable lady who hated fresh air called me "child" in the dressing-room in the morning. So I probably didn't look older. I felt older, though—years and years and years.

From the very first second that I got there I loved New York. It's the most beautiful place. And the biggest! And the most mixed up! And the sky is the brightest, clearest blue—Della Robbia sky, I heard some one call it once, and I don't believe that Italian skies can be any bluer. The boarding-house addresses Uncle Bob had given me were all near Madison Square or on Madison Avenue, so it is there that my first vivid impressions of New York were made. I walked twice all around the Square, just to see it and enjoy it. There was the giant white Metropolitan Tower, like the pictures of the Campanile of Venice, only much, much bigger; there was lovely Diana, "the

most beautiful woman in New York," poised exquisitely on the top of the Garden Tower that is a replica of the Giralda in Seville; there was the Flatiron Building, coming up like a great battleship, most beautiful on rainy days, but fine enough on clear ones, and there was the old Jerome house and the lovely little white-pillared Court House, and Doctor Parkhurst's church with its bits of ravishing colour—but, best of all, there was Farragut!

He stands at the corner of the Square, as brave and fine and straightforward in his bronze as he was in the flesh, and the sea he loved so much washes in bronze waves beneath his feet. I stood in front of that statue for half an hour and went away reluctantly. Before I went, I waved my hand to him and whispered a message up to him.

"You're going to be my patron saint, Admiral," I told him, "for I need a patron saint very much indeed. And I'm going to try to behave just the way you look."

Oh, me—before I got through hunting a place to board I needed Admiral Farragut and I wished he were there on a battleship and was standing right behind me every time I rang a doorbell. Those

boarding-houses! With bleak, forbidding fronts, and landladies whose fronts were still more bleak and forbidding! They were just like landladies on the stage—black jetted dresses, false hair piled up in ringlets, and eyes that would have made any gimlet faint with envy. And in two hours I saw more black-walnut-and-marble furniture than I had ever believed existed in the whole world. If ever I have a boarding-house, I'll have white enamel and flowered cretonne in every room in the house—no plush, no dark red velvet carpet, no large steel engravings, no puffy-fringed upholstery on apoplectic chairs! Only I suppose no one would believe that a white-enamel-and-flowered-cretonne place was a boarding-house—I'm sure I shouldn't after what I saw that day.

I went on and on and on, going right through Uncle Bob's list, and getting more discouraged every minute. I was so tired—and I didn't dare take a taxi because of that pitiful little allowance I was to have. I'd look at rooms at twenty dollars a week, and at fifteen dollars a week, and at twelve dollars a week, and then ten dollars a week, and then the landlady would pause questioningly and I'd say:

"*I must* have something cheaper." And the landlady would look at my smart little suit and my silver fox and, oh, what a suspicious queer sort of expression would come into her eyes. After two or three times like that I turned my foxy inside out and carried him over my arm, and I put the lace collar of my blouse under my coat and held the gold monogram side of my bag so it couldn't be seen. But even that didn't do much good. Ten dollars a week was the very cheapest any one seemed to have, and they were very snippy about it.

I didn't know what to do. I had got to the point where I was ready to say "one more boarding-house and I am done"—and mean it literally, when I went to a big shabby brownstone house on East Nineteenth Street. Not much good asking there, I thought, but at least I'd try it, for though the place looked shabby, it also looked clean and the brasses on the door were rubbed up like gold, showing that somebody cared about that sort of thing.

So I rang the bell and waited—and a miracle happened. The first real human-looking landlady I had seen opened the door herself—a sweet little woman with an English accent, and a trim, well-

made dark blue dress, and a little white collar and cuffs. She looked tired, but kind and nice, and after all the forbidding-browed matrons I'd seen, she seemed only a little short of an angel.

"I want a room—an inexpensive room—with board," I began just as I'd begun to all the others, but this time more hopefully.

"But I haven't a thing," she protested.

Down I sat in a heap in one of the hall chairs. "You must have *something*," I cried, "and I won't go away until you tell me I may get my trunk and come back. You are *so* nice—I can't go away. If you knew how I'd looked and looked and looked—and had such a horrid time——"

"There's one little room——" she began doubtfully.

"I'll take it," I cried, jumping up, and almost clapping my hands.

Lucky for me I said so before I'd seen it. It was the littlest room, with just a bed, a dresser with a wavy glass, a tiny table, and a chair in it, and a cretonne curtain with hooks behind for hanging up clothes. It was smaller and plainer than any servant's room in Mrs. Alex's house. But it was as clean as it could possibly be, and the cretonne

had a pink rose stripe. After I'd seen that pink rose I couldn't have been driven away.

Mrs. Harris (that was the landlady's name) said she'd give me a tripod washstand, whatever that might be, and I could put my trunk right outside the door in the hall. She kept saying that she felt sure the room wouldn't suit me and I began to feel afraid that I'd soon see the same suspicious queer glint in her eyes that I'd seen in the eyes of the other landladies I'd met that day. Everything she said was discouraging, but I wouldn't be discouraged. The room was on the fourth floor, and the nearest bathroom was on the third. There was only one window and that a very small one. But the price.

It was only seven dollars—with board!

"I'll take it," I said. "And I'll hurry and get my trunk and come back and get unpacked before the whole thing vanishes away in thin air."

Mrs. Harris laughed and told me not to worry about that, and then I paid my first week's board, and it was settled.

"I'll just write to Uncle Bob and tell him I've learned the first letter of the word economy now," I bragged to myself; but as soon as I got over my

first feeling of relief that I wouldn't have to see any more landladies, and that I'd found a place to stay that wasn't too dreadful, the blues fell on me and ravaged me. Such blues—indigo and ultramarine, of the deepest, darkest hue. To think that I would have to spend the winter in a miserable little hole like this, I who had always had a big beautiful bedroom and bath all my own, and plenty of closet room, and beautiful old mahogany furniture that was a joy to look at! I wanted so much to see Mrs. Alex and Uncle Bob that I thought I should die! I unpacked very slowly and took out my dear lovely things one by one, and when I came to the photographs I had all I could do to keep myself from throwing everything back into my trunk and rushing back to Starboro by the next train. Then I gritted my teeth.

"Brace up! Be a sport! Remember Admiral Farragut!" I told myself.

That timely warning stiffened my backbone quite a bit, and I went at my unpacking with a rush, determined to get it over and move the trunk outside as Mrs. Harris said I could do, for as it was, the trunk filled every bit of the space in my little room except where the furniture and I were. It

seemed foolish to hang my evening dresses in that little room under that cretonne curtain, so I left them in my trunk and took out only the plainest things I had, blouses and an old serge dress and a taffeta and things like that. Even those few filled up my makeshift closet to overflowing—I should say to overbulging!

My brushes and things all in tortoise shell and gold I put on the plain little old oak dresser, along with some of the photographs and my leather writing case which was too bulky for the little table. I'd hardly got all these things done and the trunk dragged out—oh, what a heavy pull it was—when I heard a big gong ring, and presently Mrs. Harris came up the stairs and said it was luncheon time and she'd go down with me. That was kind of her, as busy as she was. So down I went for my first meal in the boarding-house.

Down, down, down we went, to the first floor, and I naturally looked about for the dining-room, but it was down another flight in the basement, in a long not very well-lighted room with a low ceiling. There were two tables in the front of the room, and several small ones behind them, and it all looked so dismal to me, seeing it this first time!

Mrs. Harris sat me down at one of the small tables and introduced me to her mother, a white-haired, fat old lady, very English, and very h-less. There were a good many people at table already, and they seemed all eyes for, of course, they stared at the new boarder. I didn't stare back, but just sat down and looked at my plate and tried to keep the tears back. If there's anything lonesomer than going into a roomful of strangers to eat, I hope I shall never know what it is.

Besides Mrs. Harris's mother there was a stiff old gentleman named Mr. Bender at my table, and then a girl, not a great deal older than I, came in and sat down opposite me. She was dark and pretty, but rather ordinary looking and very plainly dressed. Her name was Miss Lacy. She kept staring and staring at me while she ate.

"Are you studying music?" she asked me curiously.

"No," I said, coldly, for I did not like her *at all*, and I thought she was awfully impertinent to ask me any questions.

She didn't say anything for a few minutes, but I saw she was looking at my frock, and at my hands. Finally she burst out with, "Say, are you going to stick around a while?"

"I suppose I shall be here all winter, at least," I said, more stiffly than before.

"Did you think of going on the stage?" she asked then, still more offensively it seemed to me.

"I'm afraid I can't discuss my personal affairs with strangers," I said, clearly, and looked her straight in the eyes. Oh, what a rude and horrid thing I was! How my cheeks burn as I recall that! Minnie Lacy coloured and looked angry, but she didn't ask any more questions, and the other people at the table didn't say anything to me, thinking, I dare say, that I was a little cat, all ready to scratch. It was an extremely disagreeable meal, except the food, which was really quite good, though plain. The china and linen were depressing, the first heavy, the second coarse. Thoughts of dear Mrs. Alex's table with the satiny damask and the old Limoges, and the heavy plain silver that had been her mother's, kept coming up before me. I was glad when luncheon was over and I could go back to my room.

There didn't seem a great deal to do there, but I wrote to Uncle Bob, and I re-arranged some of my things as well as I could, and I took a bath, and after that I dressed and went out for a little walk. At dinner I was very early, and so missed seeing

Minnie Lacy again, as I had hoped I would, and after dinner I went right up to my room and lit the gas and locked the door and got out a book I had with me and read and read and read until I was so tired of reading that I had to go to bed. I didn't dare stop reading and let myself think, by this time, and it wasn't the least use for me to tell myself to brace up and be a sport and remember Admiral Farragut, for I'd reached the last ounce of my endurance. I couldn't brace up. The only thing I could do was to keep myself from breaking down and crying the way I wanted to. Maybe a good cry would have helped me, but I was afraid to try it, for I felt that if I once began I'd never be able to stop. I was sure that I was the most unhappy girl in the world.

The next morning after a miserable night on that little bed, and a fairly good breakfast in that dark basement dining-room, I started out to look for the business school Uncle Bob had selected for me. I went across the Square so that I could look at my Farragut patron saint standing there looking so big and courageous, and then I swung up Fifth Avenue for a few blocks. It was so beautiful that morning, with the sky even bluer than the day be-

fore, if that were possible, and the air so crisp and tingling that I couldn't be utterly downhearted. I almost forgot for the moment that I was the most unhappy girl in the world. I looked at the shop windows and the people and the motors and the first thing I knew I was humming a little tune under my breath and marching along quite brisk and exhilarated. Away ahead of me I could see the big hotels and shops and all sorts of interesting looking buildings, and I felt as if I couldn't wait to explore the whole Avenue. A big crossing policeman held up the traffic and let me pass, and it was quite grand to see the motors stop, just for me to go by. That was *fun*. Presently I turned a corner, and in a couple of blocks more I found myself at the door of my new "school."

It was up a broad staircase, over some kind of a wholesale place, I think. There was an elevator, but as it was only on the second floor, I walked. The name I had seen from without, in big gold letters all along just below the windows. It didn't take a very long time for me to be set to work.

Oh, that long first day when I filled pages and pages with P—B . . . T—D! I worked at them so hard and they made me feel utterly hope-

less—little foolish slanting strokes that looked just like nothing at all to me. I knew then that I could never, never, never learn stenography. P—B . . . T—D! My head buzzed with them and my fingers got numb from holding the pencil so tight. By the time that first session ended I hated those four letters with the hate of a tortured, stupid soul. As fast as I set one down I forgot it. I thought of all the disagreeable things that begin with those letters, such as pickles—which I detest—beetles, tadpoles, and donkeys! P—B . . . T—D! The utter inanity of them. I looked about at the other members of the class—there were about twenty of us in all—and they didn't seem to be having any particular trouble. They were all working away quite cheerfully, and slanted their foolish letters up and down as if it meant something to them.

And the teacher! She was a large, robust, middle-aged woman with big shell-rimmed eyeglasses and a flat nasal voice. Her name was Miss Trippe, and I think she meant to be kind, but didn't know how. She looked at my work rather hopelessly and said:

"You're not very quick, are you?" And I could only answer that I was the slowest thing on earth.

I didn't look very much at the others in the class that day, but I did notice that they were all very middle class and wore dreadful clothes, not exactly loud, but just the sort of thing that shows the wearer hasn't the first idea either of line or colour. They were mostly younger than I—girls of fifteen and sixteen, they seemed for the most part, though there were a few older, and one poor old creature who must have been almost fifty, a pathetic, black-dressed woman, with that humble look that only hard knocks give. She worked patiently at those four detestable letters, but she was not much better than I. Some of the girls were very "quick" and Miss Trippe praised them accordingly. My moods were like balloons. I had gone into that place feeling almost at peace with the world again, in spite of the upheaval and changed conditions in my life, and I came out of it just as downhearted as I had been the day before. I didn't know what to do. I walked and walked and walked for hours, without seeing a thing. All the pageantry of the Avenue didn't attract me in the least, now —I didn't even see it as I walked through it. At last I went back to my boarding-house. I climbed those three weary flights of stairs, and threw myself

on my narrow bed, and lay there sinking farther and farther into my self-centred misery. At last I dropped off to sleep and when I woke up it was pitch dark and some one was rapping at my door. I was confused for a moment—I thought I was back home again.

"Is that you, Mrs. Alex?" I called sleepily.

The door was opened softly and some one came in. "It's me, Minnie Lacy," said a voice. And she lit the gas. "Say, what's the matter—you're not sick, are you?"

She was really concerned about me, the girl I had snubbed so hatefully the day before. "When you didn't come down to lunch or dinner, I thought I'd better look you up," she went on. "Isn't there something I can do for you?"

I was hardly awake yet. "My head aches so," I said, wearily. "You're very kind——"

She put a cool hand down on my forehead. "I should think it would ache, not having anything to eat all day," she said. "It's a wonder Mother Harris wasn't up here to see about you—oh, I forgot, she went over to Hoboken. Well, now, you come over into my room, and I'll fix you up some bouillon."

She put her arm around me, and lifted me up as gently and as tenderly as if I had been her sister. Then I came to myself a little more, though I still felt dazed and queer. I managed to sit up and push my hair back. I must have been a sight.

"Come along," said Minnie Lacy, and led me across the hall into her room. We were both rather embarrassed by this time and we didn't say much. She made me sit down on her couch and put some pillows for me to lean against. She gave me a towel wrung out of ice-cold water to refresh my eyes. Then she bustled about, getting out a tiny gas stove, and in a few minutes she had made some bouillon for me and toasted some crackers. It all tasted so good—I suddenly realized that I was very hungry.

"It's too bad you have to bother to do this for me," I said, "but it's awfully good." She put the saucepan down—she was just pouring me another cup of bouillon—and she turned around and faced me.

"Look here," she said, "what in the world is a kid like you doing here in New York with such clothes, living in a cheap little room in an ordinary boarding-house? That's what I want to know. You've been on my mind ever since I got the first

look at you. Haven't you got any folks—or any friends? You worry me."

Somehow it was very comforting to hear her—she seemed really to care. So as quickly as I could, I told her about Mrs. Alex and Uncle Bob and Father's idea that I should earn my own living—but I didn't say a word about Ranny Heeth and my broken engagement. When I had finished she sat down and looked me over.

"It's exactly like a story in a book," she said. "Well, I suppose I ought to beg your pardon for asking so many questions, but you look so young and little and scared and unhappy that I was afraid something dreadful was the matter. If this is only a two-year stunt and you've got money enough to live on till you get through the business school, you're all right. Got any friends in New York?"

"I know some people that Mrs. Alex and I had met travelling, and two of my school friends live here," I said. "But they aren't girls I was very much interested in, or very fond of, and anyway I don't feel like seeing any one right away—any one who knows me, that is. I'd have to make explanations and just now—I feel too—too—well, sensitive and sort of quivery inside."

"I should think you would, after the jolt you've had," said Minnie sympathetically, "having to get right into the business game without a word of warning, so to speak. Say, you haven't had enough to eat yet, have you?"

"That bouillon just made me realize how hungry I am," I said, and meant it, too.

"You sit here," commanded my new friend, "and I'll skip downstairs and raid the icebox. Mother Harris don't care. She puts a lot of left-overs on one shelf for anybody who comes in late and wants a bite. She's an awful good sort, Mother Harris is." With that she flew out of the room.

Now I had a chance to look about her room, and I made the most of it. It was twice the size of mine—though not so very large at that—and she had put up pictures in cheap frames and some horrible leather things with Indian heads on them, and there was a big soft couch with pillows—I was sitting on it—and a shelf with a few bright dishes and a tea-caddy and a tin cracker box. It wasn't good taste at all, but it was homey and comfortable. Just then my eye fell on the clock—it was ten o'clock and I had been asleep since three!

I went back to my own room and washed my

hands and face and straightened up my tousled hair a little, and then I heard Minnie come bumping up the stairs and I hurried back. She had a tray in her hands, and there was cold chicken on it, and a currant bun sliced and buttered, and a glass of milk, and a piece of apple pie. She *would* heat the milk, though I wanted to drink it cold, but she said no, cold food late at night wasn't good for anybody, so I just laughed and let her do it. Everything tasted so good that I ate like a pig and she sat by watching me, and refusing to take a bite herself.

"Now, see here," she said, as I began to slow up, having reached the apple pie, "don't you do anything in this burg until you let me know all about it. I'm little old Miss Wisenheimer when it comes to Manhattan Island and its ways, and I don't want you to get in wrong anywhere. I know you're thinking I'm not like the swell friends you've got back home, but I won't see any nice kid like you come to the big town and get a raw deal."

The apple pie almost choked me, because I felt so mean. "Oh, stop," I said, "I'm so ashamed of the way I spoke to you yesterday at the table I don't know what to do. I beg your pardon, really and truly *beg* it, for I was simply abominable."

"Oh, that's all right," said Minnie, "I guess you thought I was pretty fresh asking you all those questions, but you looked so forlorn and out of place, I felt as if I just had to find out what you were up to. Of course, feeling as sore as you were, you resented it. I would have, too, in a minute, if I'd been in your place."

We both felt better after that, and right then and there I made my first friend in New York. We camped down on Minnie's couch and talked till midnight. She told me she was the forewoman in a place where men's neckties were made and she described how they had to be cut and sewed and how the girls worked in piles of coloured silks—it was just as interesting as it could be, and made me feel quite differently about neckties. Always before they'd seemed about the most uninteresting things in the world, and I'd never thought of real people making them, though naturally they couldn't spring full grown out of boxes like Minerva from the head of Zeus. I said that to Minnie and she wanted to know who Minerva and Zeus were and when I'd explained as much as I knew, which wasn't much, for I'd always cut mythology at school, she said they might call the new figured silk line they were just putting out

"The Minerva." And that made me *shout,* the first real laugh I'd had for so long that it sounded strange to me. I felt heaps better when I went back to my own room at last. Minnie went with me and insisted on tucking me into bed. I let her, and I liked it, and I fell asleep thinking of all the stories I'd heard of cold, heartless New York, where no one ever looks out for a stranger. It wasn't much like the reality.

The next day I went at shorthand again—wretched stuff. I repeated my hated P—B . . . T—D innumerable times, until I could really make them right about one time in fifty without looking at the book. I also began on Cha—J—Gay—K, another jolly little group of letters. Oh, how triumphant I felt when Miss Trippe said I seemed to be getting a little more "quick." I wasn't, though. I was as slow as all the tortoises and cold molasses in the world rolled together, and they're supposed to be the slowest things there are, I believe. It took three long, hard-working weeks for me even to begin to get the hang of it.

The strangeness of my new life persisted—that I should be suddenly translated into this new environment, with things and people so utterly different from anything I'd ever known, kept coming over me

all the time. I felt bewitched, a changeling. Then, very slowly, I began to feel real again.

First of all I noticed that I began to recognize the faces of the people at the boarding-house and connect their names with them, and to think of them as real people, instead of just an unfamiliar blur. They were an odd bunch, as I suppose people in boarding-houses are everywhere. Mrs. Harris was a perfect wonder—I was lucky to have found her. She looked after everybody and everything—if she'd have been more businesslike she'd probably have made more money. At least that's what Minnie said. She was an old-fashioned sort of a housekeeper, and could never find servants who would keep things as clean as she wanted them, and so she was always doing their work over after them. And she was always doing kind little things for us all, bits of mending, or a special dish of toast when we weren't feeling well, or a cup of tea when we came in on a wet day, or something like that. It made up for the plainness, even shabbiness, of the house, and the rather stodgy food; for Mrs. Harris's ideas of food were very English and we had meat pies and Brussels sprouts and suet pudding until we loathed the very names.

"I'm slowly committing suetcide," Minnie said to

me one evening at dinner when the dessert came on, and Mrs. Harris's mother heard her and thought she meant "suicide," and it took us quite a while to explain that it was only a joke and we couldn't explain the joke, either, for then she'd have told her daughter and Mrs. Harris would have been hurt. But Minnie and I giggled so much that she finally decided it was just some of our foolishness, and told us we were "h'odd, like all h'Americans." And we let it go at that.

It sounds absurd to say so, but I, who had never saved a penny when I had had all the money I wanted to spend, actually began to save from my allowance of fifteen dollars a week. Minnie Lacy was responsible for that. She went into the state of my finances with great energy and clearness, as if she cared just as much about them as her own. She was dear and funny about it, and I had to laugh at her for being so serious, but she couldn't see anything to laugh at.

"All right," she said. "You go ahead and spend every cent, and then what are you going to do when you need some new clothes? You've got plenty of things now, but clothes don't last forever, believe me. Some day you're going to find that your last

pair of shoes has a hole in the sole, and there's no wherewithal to get any more. I know—I've been through it. It's no fun, either."

Thereupon she marched me to a savings bank one day after luncheon and made me open an account, and every week I had to put in some money. I never thought I'd have a savings account in a regular bank, but once I got it started I liked to see it grow, though I'm bound to say it didn't grow with startling rapidity. Minnie used to call it "the backward child" when she was teasing me.

My little room I re-arranged, too, and put some pictures on the wall and took down the lace curtain and put up one of scrim that I made myself; yes, I, who had never sewed a stitch, actually made a window curtain, hemstitched across the bottom, and with a nice even casing at the top!

The way I learned to sew was almost as nice as the beginning of my friendship with Minnie. There was a pretty, half-French girl named Antoinette Default, who sat next to me at the business school and often helped me when I was terribly stupid. One day I had ripped the skirt braid on my dress, and she saw me pinning it up. She fairly shrieked with horror.

"You must sew it," she cried.

I laughed at that. "I can't sew," I told her.

"Oh, but that is terrible!" she said. "You must begin at once." With that she took a little sewing case out of her bag and made me sew the braid back in place, with neat little stitches, too. She had learned to sew in a convent where she went to school, and she could do almost anything with her needle. Naturally, she thought it dreadful that I couldn't even do plain sewing properly, and she promptly instituted herself my teacher, coming home with me from the school three times a week. She made me learn to darn my stockings, fine little darns with a single thread, that were not a bit stiff and heavy, and she even gave me a sewing case like her own so that I would never go ragged. Oh, Antoinette was a dear.

I wrote and told Mrs. Alex about it, for she had so often tried to teach me to sew, and always failed. And I triumphantly reported to Uncle Bob that I had learned at least two more letters of the word economy. He must have been pleased, for he sent me five dollars and Minnie and I and Antoinette had a theatre party, with hot chocolate afterward, with the money. Minnie wanted me to save it, but when I said "Maude Adams" she ceased to protest.

By the time I was learning "word signs" and trying to remember that "establishment" is a silly little half of a parenthesis, and "yes" a half circle with a hook, and "no" a half circle without a hook, and "language" a flattish half of a parenthesis lying on its tummy, I was quite a seamstress as well. And I was learning the typewriter; but it didn't give me the same enchanting sense of satisfaction in using my hands that sewing did. I used to admire my darns until Antoinette would jeer at me. She said they were very bad, and that the sisters in the convent would have made me pick them out and do them over, but they looked beautiful to me.

There were other nice girls at the school besides Antoinette. There was one jolly little girl named Celia Doherty, as Irish as could be, who looked so like Helen Morrison back home that she might have been her twin. When I came to know her she was ever so much cleverer than Helen, though of course she wasn't dressed so well, and didn't know how to dress well. But then Helen had never thought of anything but frocks and suitors and parties in her life, while Celia had the most cosmopolitan sort of knowledge, even if she did combine colours badly and wear ugly blouses. Socialism and suffrage were her

two hobbies and she used to take me to socialist meetings where the most interesting people talked of the most interesting things! Of course, I didn't understand what they were getting at a good bit of the time, and Celia said never mind, neither did they, always, but the thing that was so thrilling about them was the intense way they cared about things quite apart from themselves and their own personal interests. I had never thought of people being so mad about impersonal things and I loved to hear them go on and on. It was just as if they were opening wide doors in every direction for me.

At noon sometimes Celia and I would go to the Suffrage Shop for luncheon, for it's only twenty-five cents and there's always something doing there. Minnie wouldn't let me go very often though, for she said that since I'd paid for my board, including luncheon, at Mrs. Harris's it was rank extravagance to go somewhere else and in this way have to pay twice. Minnie was a perfect shark at keeping an eye on my pocketbook, and at helping me keep my expenses down.

But there was heaps to see and ever so many places to go without paying any money. Oh, I went to strikes and fires and street meetings and free lectures

and free concerts and flower shows and exhibitions and museums—there was always *something* going on, and you just had to see it to feel alive. The days went so fast, now that I'd really got into the swing of my new life. Celia said one day that life was the Great Movie—and I understood what she meant.

One of the teachers at the school said that stenographers who knew a foreign language or two always got good places and high pay, so at once I decided to brush up on languages, and began to read French with Antoinette, and to study Spanish with the strangest Spanish lady, a large, stout woman with a moustache, who shrieked as she talked, and powdered herself until she looked like something floured ready to fry. She was a good teacher though, and I loved my lessons after I got through being frightened when she shrieked at me.

When I wrote to Uncle Bob and Mrs. Alex and told them what I was doing they were both worried for fear I was overworking. But I wasn't. I was stronger than I ever was in my life, and I could walk miles and think nothing of it. My Spanish teacher, Señorita de Gamo, lived up on East Sixty-fifth Street and I'd walk up there and then back to Mrs.

Harris's, almost five miles altogether, and not be tired a bit. One of Celia's friends said that New York was the city where one achieved the impossible every day, and that it was the tonic, invigorating salt air that gave everybody such extraordinary vitality. Which may or may not have been true; but I did know that I felt awfully waked up and eager to be doing things all the time.

## CHAPTER IV

NONE of the people at the boarding-house interested me except Minnie, though I got acquainted with most of them and we were all friendly enough, ostensibly friendly, that is, for there was always a little undercurrent of comment and gossip though Minnie said they were none of them such "knockers" as she'd seen in other boarding-houses. But she said, too, and with lots more patience than I felt about it: "Most of these old dames haven't got a thing to occupy their minds except what they see right here, and if they can find any satisfaction in knowing what time Mrs. James's husband gets in, and what Mrs. James said to him, and how much Mrs. Harris pays for roasting beef, and whether or not Miss Ellison touches up her hair, and whether or not Mr. Dancy has got his raise—I say let 'em have it. It must be pretty sad to get old and not have any folks of your own, and nothing to look forward to but to-morrow's dessert."

"I suppose that's so," I conceded. "Oh, well, of course, it's so. And I *am* sorry for them, but I do wish they wouldn't ask me prying questions, and I do wish Mrs. Trent wouldn't open the door of her room a crack and peer out every time I go up or down. I feel sure she comes upstairs and looks over our things when we're out."

"Leave a little note for her," suggested Minnie, "telling her that the really spicy bits are locked up in your trunk and that you carry the key around your neck and never take it off, even when you take a bath."

"Or I might write a love-letter to some one—a real sickish, sentimental one," I said, laughing at the notion, "and leave it, half finished, under my writing case. Then if she was snooping she would read it and have something wonderful to tell the others."

"Speaking of love-letters," said Minnie, "did you notice the newcomer at the front table? The tall fellow with the big brown eyes and the brown tie that exactly matches them? Isn't it funny how I always look at a man's necktie first? More than once I've sat staring at some man's necktie in the Subway or the El, and mighty near called out to him: 'I know how much that tie cost wholesale and

who made it, and I'll bet you the silk frays before you wear it two weeks.'"

"Well, why not?" I asked. "Neckties are your business. But about the new young man with the brown tie—yes, I did notice him. He seemed so much nicer than the others at the table."

Mrs. Harris kept one table up front just for young men, and they liked to have it to themselves. They made a sort of club out of it, and called themselves the Bachelors' Retreat, or some ridiculous name. They weren't very brilliant, but they were all well enough, in their way. The new young man had seemed different—quieter, better mannered, and I had noticed him on that account, but I didn't know that Minnie had until she said what she did. "Do you know his name?" I asked her.

"No, not yet," she said. "But from the way he has been looking over at our table and regarding a certain light-haired young lady there I shouldn't be surprised if I should learn it pretty soon."

"A certain light-haired—Silly!—do you mean me?" I asked. "He hasn't looked at me once that I've seen. And if he did, I wouldn't want to meet him."

"Don't you like men?" Minnie asked curiously. "You never talk about them."

I thought of Ranny Heeth and my bitter unhappiness at finding him out. I had never told Minnie about him, and I did not think I ever would—at any rate it wasn't far enough in the background yet for me even to think about it without hot waves of humiliation. I flushed up at her question, but I tried to act as if it was nothing.

"Of course I like men," I said. "It's odd, too, when you think of it, for I did have plenty of attention at home—don't think I'm vain to say so, will you?—but since I've been here I don't believe I've spoken to a man, except the clerks in the soda fountains, and then the conversation is very limited, and they aren't what you would call romantic, now, are they?"

"They look mighty good when they're putting double whipped cream on my hot chocolate," said Minnie.

"Greedy," I taunted her; and in throwing a pillow at me she forgot to say anything more about whether I liked men, and also about the new young man with the brown eyes.

Of course, after Minnie had said that he stared at me, I kept wondering all through dinner whether or not he was staring, and was dying to look, only

it didn't seem good manners. When at last I did let my eyes wander over to the Bachelors' table, and casually take in the new young man, he wasn't looking at me at all, and I was so amused at myself for being such a goose I almost laughed then and there. I might have known it.

But a few days later when I went into Mrs. Harris's little sitting-room to pay my rent, I stumbled over the feet of some one and I heard a masculine voice saying, "Oh, I do beg your pardon," and I was saying it, too, so it was a duet of beg-pardons. It was the new young man, and he was there all alone.

"I came to find Mrs. Harris," I explained.

"So did I," he said. "And the only difference is, that I found her and she told me to wait here while she went upstairs for some change."

"I'm paying my rent, too," I said. "But I always bring the right amount, for it's heaps of trouble for Mrs. Harris to change bills."

"I'll remember that," he said. "Thank you for telling me. I didn't mean to be a bother."

Of course that sounded as if I'd been priggishly rebuking him for the way he paid his board, and I felt extremely foolish.

"I didn't mean, I'm sure," I began politely,

"to criticise your method of paying your rent, or to seem to offer suggestions for improving it. It's my unfortunate habit to say the first thing that comes into my head, and it's always the wrong thing."

"Please don't apologize," he returned with equal politeness, "I assure you I didn't misconstrue what you said at all."

After that there were some moments of silence, as we'd both used the best words in our vocabulary and certainly exhausted the subject. Then in came Mrs. Harris with a handful of money. "Oh, Miss Brennan is here, too," she said, "Miss Brennan, this is Mr. Peters. Dear me, with all this money I shall be so rich I won't know what to do."

Of course, since she had Mr. Peters's change I hung back so his account could be settled first, and of course, he hung back because I, being of the feminine gender, should precede him. We were very polite about that. The end of it was that we left Mrs. Harris's sitting-room at the same time, though I believe he loitered a little—for I'd insisted that he pay his bill first.

"Have you—have you been in New York long?" he asked.

I looked up at him, and he really was a good-look-

ing boy—broad-shouldered and pleasant-faced, and just now, looking eager to please. "Only about two months," I said. "But I love it."

"I don't," he said. "I just wish my firm would let me go back to Chicago."

"Chicago's horrid," I said. "So dirty, I think."

He took up the cudgels with a vengeance. "Why, it isn't dirty," he said earnestly, "it just looks so. It's not half so dirty as Pittsburgh, or lots of other places. It's just fine. The people out there are so much more friendly than here in the East—they've got more humanity, I say——"

"Oh, they have *not!*" I exclaimed.

"Prove it," he demanded.

So that was the way my acquaintance with Jimmie Peters began—with an argument. It was Saturday afternoon and I was waiting for Minnie to come home, so I sat right down on the stairs and fought it out with him, then and there. I even forgot to listen for old Mrs. Trent's stealthily opened door, though if I'd thought I might have known that she'd have been peering over the landing. By the time Minnie came in Jimmie Peters and I were getting on very well. He reminded me of the boys in Starboro, and I liked him.

Minnie liked him, too. After I had introduced him to her he had said, nicely, not pushingly at all: "What are you going to do this afternoon?"

"We're going up to the Metropolitan Museum for a look at the Sorollas," I said.

"Would it be—would I be a nuisance—if I asked to come along?" he asked. "I haven't any friends in New York, and I've been—pretty lonesome. But if you're going with a crowd, or have some other plans, please say so, and I'll hope that things may be different some other time."

That gave us a good chance to escape if we didn't want him, you see, and I thought that was pretty decent, and thoughtful, too. I looked at Minnie and she looked at me, and then she said, in her blunt way: "Why, you can come along, Mr. Peters, I guess. All I hope is that you won't know any more about art than I do. It's Miss Brennan who's the real highbrow in this party."

So that was how it was settled, and he got his hat and overcoat while we got into our wraps—or rather I did, for Minnie already had her outside things on, and we all set out together.

We had a jolly afternoon, and then Mr. Peters took us for tea to a cunning little Dutch tea-room,

and we talked about the pictures, first, and then about New York, and then about the other people in the tea-room, and then about ourselves. We found out that Mr. Peters was a Westerner, and that he worked for an advertising firm with offices in a lot of cities. He said they send their young men round from city to city, so that they'll get to know all the customers, and all the localities. He made a regular little oration about advertising. He said it was the greatest business that ever was, that it was the galvanizer of all modern progress, that without it commerce would vanish—I can't remember half of it. But it was very evident that he was heart and soul in his work. Minnie and I both liked that, only I felt a little out of it, for she knew so much more about business than I did, and she could talk so intelligently to Mr. Peters while I had to sit by and listen.

It made me see, though, that there was a lot more in Father's idea that I should know how to earn my own living than I had suspected. Why, business was another big world, and as Minnie and Mr. Peters talked they seemed to be opening doors for me, too, just as Celia's socialist friends did. Everywhere I could see out there were great vistas—yes, this was the worst of it—of things I didn't know about and

hadn't wanted to know about. I listened with all my ears.

I kept thinking, too, of how nice it was to have a cup of afternoon tea again, prettily served, for it reminded me of Mrs. Alex's tea table at home, and I ordered macaroons because she always has them, only hers are put together with spiced chocolate, while these were plain. They had the right flavour, though. Minnie had a toasted crumpet—she loves them, and Mr. Peters had a slice of layer cake, because he says he never had enough layer cake and never expects to. He had never seen any one put lemon in tea until I did it, and he insisted on trying it, and declared that he'd never have it any other way after this. Minnie takes hers with cream, so she made fun of us.

We walked all the way home down the cold blowy Avenue, with all the street lights glittering out and the motors coming uptown in a great, bewildering throng, and on the sidewalks people hurrying along wrapped in their furs and looking so New Yorky and smart. I fairly pranced along.

"I just adore this time of day on the Avenue," I said. "Honestly, is there anything like it in Chicago?"

And Mr. Peters reluctantly admitted that there wasn't—maybe. At least he hadn't seen it.

So that was the beginning of our knowing Jimmie Peters. He wasn't always hanging round, but he was with us enough for us to make sure we liked him, and that he was a thoroughly good sort. I wouldn't have admitted it to Minnie, but I liked to have him go out with us in the evening—I never could get used to going about with another girl late at night, coming home from places. I wasn't afraid, but I just wasn't comfortable.

In some way or other Jimmie Peters must have guessed this, for very often when we'd been to the theatre, or to a concert or the movies together, Minnie and I would find him waiting for us when we came out, ready to take us home. I introduced him to Celia and Antoinette, and he was just as nice to them as he was to Minnie and me, only he told me he thought Celia's ideas were half-baked, and that half the time she was saying things she didn't know anything about from actual experience. I never told Celia, for it would have made her wild.

Minnie liked Mr. Peters, though at first she made a pretence that his attentions were all for me, and that she was only a gooseberry. But as I pointed out to

her, one could hardly call them attentions, and if she didn't go, I wouldn't, for I'd much rather be with her than with him. After that she was all right and she enjoyed having him around, too. As a matter of fact, he wasn't round so very much, but once a week or so he would take us somewhere, or go walking with us on Sunday afternoon and then to tea afterward—not very much, but then why should he have done anything at all? He didn't have a great deal of money to spend, for he was putting his kid brother through college and it took a lot. He used to read us the letters his brother wrote, and talk about him a great deal, for there were only the two of them. I thought he was lucky to have a brother and I told him so one day.

I hadn't meant to be pathetic, and when I saw how he felt about my being an orphan, and having only my guardian, I was sorry I'd told him, for it really seemed to be on his mind. I couldn't tell him that I was learning "a wage-earning occupation" to carry out a plan of my father's and that it wasn't permanent, as I'd told Minnie, for I didn't know him well enough, and he might have thought that I wanted him to know that I was independent. So I asked him please not to worry about me, for I was

learning stenography as well as one of my superlative stupidity could be expected to, and that it wouldn't be long before I could leave the business school, and that if Minnie could get along so well there was no reason why I shouldn't. But he only shook his head and gloomed about it.

Though I wouldn't have admitted it to Minnie, Jimmie Peters certainly did not treat us both alike, and it made me very uncomfortable. He was all right with her, and pleasant and funny, and seemed to like to have her when we went out, but there was *something*—oh, he was gentler with me, more thoughtful, and didn't tease me as he did Minnie. I've always thought it was horrid for a girl to go about thinking that all the men she meets are in love with her, or at least attracted by her—Claire Morrison is like that—but unless you are a perfect ninny of course you know when a man begins to feel—oh, well, let's say *sentimental*, toward you. That's what I began to notice about Jimmie Peters.

And it worried me. Of course I liked him, and he was awfully useful—though it isn't very nice of me to say that—but as for thinking of him in any way but as a casual friend—why, it couldn't be done.

I had made up my mind that I was done with men

in any way but that. After my experience with Ranny Heeth, I knew that I would never care for another man in the way I'd cared for him. I'd trusted Ranny absolutely, and thought that he was all that was good and fine, and when he proved himself so different from the ideal I had of him, my faith in men was shattered. Even though I might like them and be pleasant to them, in the depths of my heart I'd always have a lurking suspicion that what they appeared and what they were really were not the same. So naturally it was quite useless for Jimmie Peters to begin to feel interested in me in any way but just on the surface.

Yet I didn't want to hurt him, and besides, I told myself, I might be imagining a good bit of it—possibly he wasn't thinking of me at all as I fancied he was. I wondered if we couldn't drop him gradually and no harm done.

"Don't you think," I asked Minnie one evening when we were going round to Celia's, "that Jimmie Peters hangs round too much? I'm getting a little bit tired of him."

"Oh, I don't know," said Minnie. "He's all right—certainly he's useful."

That was just what I'd thought, and had been

ashamed of myself for. It wasn't like Minnie to say things of that sort, either.

"He *is* useful," I admitted. "But we got on pretty well without him, didn't we?"

"Of course we did," said Minnie, "but look here, we can't drop him just like that, without a reason."

"We don't need to drop him all at once," I said. "We could just not be—oh, you know—quite so accessible."

"That's a grand way to put it," said Minnie, dryly. "Well—I'm satisfied. Let's can Jimmie—painlessly, as it were."

We went along another block and then Minnie asked abruptly:

"Has he done anything to annoy you? Because if he has I certainly will give him one grand good talking-to."

"Oh, *no*," I protested, horrified at the rumpus I'd started, "he's—well, he's just a little in the way, I think, sometimes."

"I see," said Minnie, and she didn't say another word, but I had an uncomfortable feeling that she saw the real reason perfectly well, but didn't feel free to talk it out since I wouldn't.

I might have saved myself this little conversation,

for only a few days after that Jimmie came in to dinner looking excited and glad and sorry all at once. After dinner he hunted up Minnie and me and told us the reason.

"What do you think!" he said. "I'm going back to Chicago."

"To Chicago!" we both exclaimed.

"Arranged the whole thing by long distance this afternoon and leave to-morrow. I'm to have a department of my own, and I've got a raise, and the old man said he'd had his eye on me for some time and I've made good all along the line. Pretty bad, what?"

We congratulated him, and told him it was the finest thing we ever heard, and that we were both just as glad as we could be for him.

"And now," he said, "I want you both to come out with me and celebrate. We'll go to the theatre and have supper at the Knickerbocker Grill, and dance and just generally break loose. You've both been so kind to me that I hope you'll let me have this one little party before I go. Come—will you? We'll have taxicabs and everything. I—I do hope you'll let me have this one last evening."

"I'd love it," said Minnie, "but I can't go, for

I've got one of my bad facial neuralgia attacks and I've got to get to bed as soon as I can. It's too provoking."

"That is too bad," said Jimmie heartily, "but you"—he turned to me—"you can go, can't you, Miss Leslie? I began to plan on this as soon as I knew I was to go. Don't let the whole thing fall through."

"Oh, you must go, Leslie," said Minnie, "and then you can come home and tell me all about it. I'd give anything to go along."

So—he was leaving to-morrow. There didn't seem to me to be any reason why I shouldn't go to his party, as he called it. "I'll be awfully glad to go," I said, "but I am sorry Minnie can't."

"I'll go telephone for seats and a taxi," said Jimmie. "We haven't got so very long to get ready, you know."

Of course Minnie and I dashed upstairs at that, and while she lay on my bed with a hot water bag pressed to her cheek, I opened my trunk and got out my evening dresses. If we were going to the Knickerbocker Grill for supper and to dance, I'd have to wear the right clothes. I hadn't had them out before since I'd come to New York, and they

did look a little crumpled, but I shook them. They were dears, all of them—a blue taffeta with little prim flowers on it, a white tulle with a shaded rainbow girdle caught under a big buckle of brilliants, and a shell-pink charmeuse with lace flounces.

"Which shall I wear, Minnie?" I asked. "You must decide."

"Wear the pink," said Minnie. "It looks like the inside of a baby's heaven."

So I snatched out my pink slippers and stockings and the white lace fan with the pink rosette that goes with it, and my black velvet evening cape, and I hustled into the whole outfit. I only had time to do my hair very simply, but then I never bother very much about my hair anyway. I put it on top of my head, though, and loosened it—not at all in the close roll I usually wear it. It was great fun to get into an evening dress again—I loved it, even if it was only for Jimmie Peters, and when I was ready Minnie said I looked lovely. So I ran downstairs quite content, and wasn't even annoyed when old Mrs. Trent pussyfooted to her door, as usual, and then craned herself over the banisters.

Jimmie met me at the foot of the stairs, with his evening clothes on and silk hat—he looked perfectly

splendid. There's all the difference in the world how men wear evening clothes. A taxi was purring away at the curb, and I felt quite grand when we got in, it had been so long since I'd ridden in anything prouder than the Fifth Avenue bus.

Jimmie was very silent as we sped away uptown, and I said to him rallyingly, "I believe, after all, you're sorry to leave New York."

He turned and looked at me. "I am sorry," he said, "for one reason only, though. This is my first big chance, and of course I'd be criminally foolish if I didn't take it and make the most of it —but, after all, business isn't everything."

"What!" I teased. "Business isn't everything? Advertising isn't the world's greatest institution, the supporter of commerce, the galvanizer of trade— I wish I could remember all the things you said about it the first time you took Minnie and me out to tea."

"Go ahead," he laughed. "Make me eat my words—I'm willing. Did you really remember what I said that day? I hardly thought you were listening—you just sat there looking so feminine—and fluffy—and pink-and-white, it struck me afterward I was an awful bonehead to talk dull old shop stuff to a girl like you."

"I suppose you thought I couldn't understand it," I said. "Well, let me remind you that you weren't talking to me—you were talking to Minnie and she knows all about advertising and business. She's clever."

"You could understand it—you don't think I meant you couldn't, either," said Jimmie; "but it's not the sort of thing you *ought* to know about. You're a different type from Miss Lacy altogether. She's a typical business woman and you are——"

"And I'm a goose," I added, feeling discouraged and a little hurt by his words. Of course, Minnie is splendid, but I didn't think it was necessary for Jimmie Peters to rub it in that I was so ignorant.

"You're not a goose," said Jimmie Peters, "but I'd hate to see you turned into the business woman. You were meant to be protected and taken care of, and to have a home, and to live among beautiful surroundings, and to be happy, and not have a lot of cares and responsibilities. I wish you knew what I really think about you—I wish I could tell you——"

His voice deepened and almost broke, and I jumped at the pause in his speech, to keep him from saying any more. "This conversation is becoming what you might call personal," I said. "Oh, look, we

must be at the theatre. Heavens, what a jam of automobiles. Don't those limousines with electric lights inside shining on fat ladies with gay evening wraps and jewelled things in their hair make you think of goldfish globes? The people who ride in them have the goggly look that goldfish have, always."

It wasn't necessary for me to rattle on any longer, for we really had reached the theatre, and Jimmie's tender moment had been averted, for which I was thankful. I remember hearing a daring old lady who had been a great belle and beauty, a friend of Mrs. Alex's, say, that it was poor tactics to let a man propose on the way to a party or any other gaiety. On the way home, it was all right, she said, mischievously, but if he did it in the early part of the evening and was rejected he'd make you and himself have a miserable evening, and if he was accepted it was almost as bad, for of course you'd want to be alone with him. She put it more pointedly than I had, but I couldn't help remembering what she had said as I headed Jimmie off. How I did wish Minnie had come!

We had good seats, away down front—Jimmie must have paid an enormous premium for them—and we got there just as the curtain was rolling up.

It was a musical comedy, one that had been all the vogue for several months, and the music was light and catchy, the voices as good as any one can expect in musical comedy, the funny man really funny, the costumes as pretty as the girls who wore them —which was saying a good bit—the soubrette was young enough really to be a soubrette, and the leading man wasn't irritating. No one can expect anything more of a musical show, and I settled myself to enjoy it. It was ever so pleasant, too, to be downstairs instead of away back in the balcony where Minnie and I always bought seats, and to have on an evening dress and be with a good-looking young man who was well-mannered and entertaining. I *enjoyed* it, every bit of it.

Moreover, Jimmie dropped his sentimental mood and was jolly and gay, for which I was thankful. He pretended that the leading man was looking at me and singing all his love songs at me, and I pretended that the prettiest girl in the chorus had been making eyes at him as if she knew him from the moment she came on. And we laughed at all the jokes and hummed the choruses of the songs and read the ridiculous "What the Man Will Wear" notes in the programme in the intermissions.

"And now for the Knickerbocker Grill," said Jimmie, when at last the show was over and we came out. "Do you realize that I've never danced with you?"

"I don't suppose I *can* dance, it's been such ages since I've done it," I answered, hopping into the taxi.

"What d'you mean, ages?" asked Jimmie, getting in beside me and giving his silk hat a knock in the process.

"Oh, several months—and that's long enough to forget all the steps, to say nothing of getting completely out of date with the new ones," I said. "Did you hurt your hat?"

"Probably," he said, "but why worry? It'll get worse bangs than that when it's packed and on its way to Chicago."

"I'm sorry you're going," I said, before I thought. "You've been so nice to Minnie and me. It's been almost as good as having a big brother."

"You mean well, but your phrase is unfortunate," he said, and from his tone I knew that I must 'ware shoal again.

"Oh, my gracious!" I said, "are big brothers as disagreeable as all that? I take back the phrase, if it

offends you. Let us say 'uncle,' or 'grandfather.' They're indulgent and kind at all times, if what we read in stories is true."

"Say grandfather, by all means," replied Jimmie sarcastically; "or great-grandfather, if my sole duty to you is to be indulgent and kind."

But the taxi stopped at the restaurant, so we never got the relationship matter decided.

The Grill was going like mad when we entered, with a big orchestra playing enticing dance music at one end, and people flying about over the floor in the centre of the room, and all around it were set tables just as tightly wedged together as they could be, and yet let people sit at them. The head waiter told Jimmie there wasn't any table, but Jimmie slipped him a bill, and pretty soon we got a fine one, only about as big as a pocket handkerchief, to be sure, but right next to the dancing floor.

"I'll leave the eats to you," said Jimmie, "but mind, they must be the real thing—no club sandwich stuff to-night."

So I ordered strained gumbo, and squab chicken, Alma salad, toasted rolls, and sweet butter, and sauterne cup, all the things I loved and hadn't had since I'd been in New York. As soon as the waiter

had gone with the order Jimmie said, "Now come along, let's dance."

So we danced. Oh, it was simply heavenly. Jimmie was a good dancer—an awfully good dancer, strong and smooth and light, and his step just suited mine. It was rapturous to dance again—I didn't know how much I'd missed it. We finished the dance and the encore just as the waiter got back with the gumbo. And after it we danced again.

Then came our supper, and everything was just as good as it could be, but we didn't eat properly, for the music was so enticing that we'd have to leave off, right between bites, and dance some more.

Finally, though, we did manage to devour the most of the supper, and then Jimmie suggested that we have peaches Melba, and I said I adored them, so we settled down for more eating and more dancing. It sounds quite like a Bacchanalian orgy, but it wasn't; only I hadn't done anything like this for so long, that it seemed perfectly ecstatic to me. I didn't care how late it was, nor how tired I'd be the next day nor anything, if I could just go on dancing—and dancing—and dancing!

The crowd thinned out a little bit, which made the floor less crowded, and, as we were turning at the end

where the musicians are Jimmie said, very quietly: "Don't look now, but I think there's a friend of yours at the table to the left of the pillar. He's been watching you ever since we got here and I think he must know you. Notice him as we come round again."

Of course, when we came round again I looked where Jimmie had said, and there, at a table with two other young men—sat Ranny Heeth! He was looking straight at me, and trying to catch my eye. I gave a little jump and almost lost step but I managed to keep my face perfectly blank, and not to speak.

"Let's sit down, I'm tired," I whispered to Jimmie.

So down we sat and he looked at me concernedly, and it wasn't very sensible of me, for since the crowd had thinned I was sitting so I faced directly across to Ranny Heeth. He still kept staring and staring as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

"It's a man I used to know at home," I said to Jimmie. "His name's Ranny Heeth and he used to come a lot to the house where I was staying."

It sounded so flat—but I couldn't think of anything else to say.

"You must have been pretty much interested in him at one time if the mere sight of him can affect you so," said Jimmie; "you're as white as a sheet."

Of course it was none of his business who I was interested in, or whether or not I was white as a sheet, but I could hardly say so. He looked angry.

"Am I pale?" I said, trying to pass it off with a laugh, "I ought to have borrowed a little bit of Mrs. James's rouge." Mrs. James is a lady at the boarding-house who puts it on in layers.

Jimmie didn't smile a bit, and that moment Ranny Heeth got up and started to come over to our table. He didn't walk very steadily—he'd evidently been drinking hard. His eyes looked puffy and mean.

He stopped a little way from my chair, right in front of me, putting his hand on the next table to steady himself.

"Aren't you going to speak to me, Leslie?" he said, in an unpleasantly familiar way.

Right then and there all of my agitation left me. I felt just raging mad, clear through. I turned round as composedly as you please, and I looked him square in the face.

"I am surprised," I said, perfectly clearly, "that you should have the impertinence to come and speak to *me*."

"Why, Leslie—why, Leslie——" he began to stammer.

"If you don't go at once," I went on, "I'll ask the management to—to remove you." I don't know how I ever came to think of that, but it sounded *stunning*.

"You don't need to ask the management while I'm around," said Jimmie, whose eyes had fairly been standing out through all this. He got up and stood before Ranny. "You heard what the lady said, didn't you? Better beat it while the going's good, my friend—or shall I help you?"

"Oh, so you're her latest!" said Ranny, sneeringly. "Well, I'm sorry to see her taste seems to be degenerating. Leslie's latest!" And he began to laugh in a nasty, drunken way. Jimmie stepped over and took him by the shoulder, walked him down the length of the room, and through the door, without saying a word. Ranny tried to get away, and his friends hurried after him, and there was a flurry among the waiters and guests. I sat still, and I trembled—I hate a scene; but from the look in Jimmie's eyes I just knew that Ranny Heeth was going to get something he needed, and I was glad of it.

In about five minutes Jimmie came back, his eyes sparkling and his head up. "I beg your pardon for leaving you alone, like that," he said, "but I took

that damned—excuse me—little cad outside and gave him a short but thorough lesson in manners to a lady. Shall we go? Check, please," he added to the waiter.

"Do let's go," I said; "every one's staring."

"Let 'em stare," said Jimmie grimly, "I wish they could see *him*."

When we got outside and in another taxi, I asked, for my curiosity was rampant: "What did you do to him, Jimmie?"

"Oh, just taught him to speak politely to ladies," said Jimmie evasively.

I knew I owed Jimmie an explanation. "He is a man I knew in my home in Starboro," I said, "and he was—very attentive to me at one time. Then something happened that made me think of him quite differently than I had before, and I never wanted to see him or speak to him again. He's—he's what you called him, I'm afraid, Jimmie—a cad, and I may be vindictive and revengeful, but I'm glad you punished him."

Jimmie laughed an excited little laugh. "Gee, you were fine," he said boyishly, "when you turned round and gave it to him there at the table. You've got more spirit—and more nerve! It was just what

he deserved, of course, but most girls wouldn't have known how to say it."

"It's a dramatic ending for our last evening, isn't it?" I said.

"Oh—our last evening." He was still a minute, as if considering hard. "It's no use," he went on, "I might as well get it off my chest. I can't go away in uncertainty. I'd never have had the nerve to say this, Leslie, if my raise and my new position didn't make it possible for me to give you a home, and take you out of that grubby boarding-house, and——"

"Don't, Jimmie," I begged. "I—I can't bear to have you go on."

"I may as well finish it," he said. "You surely know that I've been crazy about you from the very first day I saw you come in and sit down at the table, looking no more suited to your surroundings than a flower in a weed-patch. I didn't have anything to offer you before, and so long as I hadn't I wouldn't say anything—but it's been pretty hard. Tell me, didn't you think—couldn't you guess what I was feeling—all the time?" He gently took one of my hands, but I shrank away. I could feel sobs coming up in my throat.

"Oh, Jimmie," I said, miserably. "I suspected—I wasn't sure—and if I had been sure I never would have let you say it. You're a dear, and any girl might be proud to—to love you——"

"But you don't, eh?" he asked. "I thought not. I thought not, only I wouldn't let myself give up hoping. Don't cry—I wouldn't make you cry for anything."

"I'm not crying," I choked out, "but I don't want to hurt you, either. You've been so good and kind to me, and it's made so much more fun for Minnie and me to have you with us——"

"Don't rub that in," he said; "if I was any pleasure to you, I suppose it was as near heaven as I'll ever get. Listen, Leslie, don't you think that, maybe—if I waited—and was very patient—you might come to feel differently? I'd wait a million years for you, if you would only find out at last that you could care for me."

I shook my head. "No, no," I said, "that wouldn't be fair. I think heaps of you, Jimmie, but I don't love you and I never could. There's all the difference in the world between liking and loving, you know."

"Yes, I know that," he said, "all the difference

in the world. Somehow, I have a hunch that that fellow I thrashed to-night has something to do with this—I feel as if he was mixed up in it some way. If he is, I'm glad I thrashed him."

"No, he isn't," I said hastily, for I didn't want to tell him about Ranny and me, even now. "He was very rude and disagreeable to me, and he's—oh, he's just a worm. I've forgotten all about him long ago. He's less than nothing to me."

"So am I," said Jimmie. "I'm less than nothing, too." And his voice sounded old and tired.

"Don't say that, Jimmie," I begged. "I'll always think of you as the best—and the truest——"

"Friend," he finished the sentence for me. "And I don't want to be your friend. There—I'm ashamed of myself—I'm distressing you. I'll behave after this, Leslie—truly. I just went off my head for a moment. I won't trouble you again—about this. If it's any comfort for you to know it, I'm glad I knew you—and loved you—even if you couldn't love me back."

He took both my hands now and held them in his for the rest of the way, and when the cab had gone and we were in the hall, he said steadily: "Thank you for going with me to-night. I'll al-

ways remember how you look in this pink frock, with that little toy fan in your hands."

He held out his hand and looked into my eyes to say good-night, and I—well, I did something I oughtn't to have done, but I don't care. I threw both my arms around his neck and kissed Jimmie Peters, right then and there.

"Good-bye, Jimmie," I said, "I'm *always* your friend, forever and ever. And I hope you'll meet some other girl who is really good enough for you, and who'll fall in love with you right off, and that you'll love her more than you ever thought of loving me." And I kissed him again and ran upstairs. It may have been bold, it may have been horrid, but I say again—*I don't care.*

## CHAPTER V

WHEN I got up to my room the light was still burning, and I had a twinge of conscience about running up Mrs. Harris's gas bill—how had I ever come to forget it! I opened the door hastily, and there on my bed, wrapped in the coverlet and with her hot water bottle still under her cheek, was Minnie. A book beside her showed that she had fallen asleep while reading. As I came in she drowsily opened her eyes, and then sat up, rubbing them. "I must have dropped off," she remarked sleepily; and then, waking up a little more, "Goodness, Leslie, look in the glass. Your face is simply flaming, and your eyes are like saucers. What *has* happened?"

As if I could tell her!

I slipped off my cape and put my fan down on the dresser. "Oh, nothing," I said, "only I had such a good time, and danced so much, and it was all such fun. How's your neuralgia?"

"Hush," said Minnie, with a grimace. "Don't

wake it up. I think it's gone to sleep, but if we notice it, it will begin doing stunts again. I'm awfully glad you had such a good time. What did you have to eat—and how does Jimmie dance?"

"He dances like an angel and we had a perfectly delicious supper," I said. "What time is it? Mercy—it's almost half-past two! And we're going to have test exercises in school to-morrow morning. I'll be dead."

Minnie got up slowly and put on her slippers. "So'll I," she yawned, "and it's busy season, too." She picked up her hot water bottle and got half-way out the door. Then she looked back, mockingly. "Tell me—did he get his chance?" she asked.

The colour came up to my face, and I didn't look at her. "His chance—what do you mean?" I asked, as unconcernedly as I could.

"You know what I mean," said Minnie, and laughed and shut the door behind her.

I gave a gasp. So she had known all the time. I began to wonder if her neuralgia was real or only a blind to give Jimmie Peters the evening alone with me. One sure thing—she'd never tell me. I went to bed still tingling with excitement, and after I fell asleep uneasy dreams of prancing chorus girls

and hurrying waiters, and Ranny Heeth balancing himself unsteadily, and Jimmie Peters standing over him, kept rushing by me in an endless confused procession.

It was not much wonder that I overslept, and when I got down to breakfast Minnie had gone to her work and Jimmie had taken the early train for Chicago. I hurried off to the school and got through my tests better than I expected. My little whirl into gaiety and excitement receded before the plain stodgy routine of my daily life, until it seemed nothing but part of those uneasy dreams of mine of the night before. It didn't seem to have happened at all. Only—Jimmie was gone.

And I missed him, too—I didn't imagine I would miss him half so much. I hadn't realized how much his thoughtfulness and his looking out for me had meant to me, not by half. No more Jimmie waiting to take us home after a concert or a lecture. No more Jimmie to walk with me up to Señorita de Gamo's. No more Jimmie to take Minnie and me to tea and tell us all about his latest achievement in advertising. It made a great big hole in my life, and in Minnie's too, though we tacitly avoided talking about him.

It piqued me a little that he did not write to me after he went away. He sent us some postcards with messages on them about the great superiority of Chicago over New York, but they were Minnie's as much as mine. Two whole weeks went by and that was all we heard from Jimmie. Perhaps, I argued with myself, it was better that he should forget me at once, and have it done with, but no girl likes to be treated with such ruthless common sense. I felt that if he had cared so very much he wouldn't have been able to forget quite so easily.

I was thinking about Jimmie, and how unflatteringly sensible he was, the morning I found Mrs. James's pin. I'd never liked Mrs. James, though she had made a point of being nice to me; and I'd never go into her room and sit and talk with her, as she was always urging me to do. She and her husband had one of Mrs. Harris's best rooms, and she was an idle, vain, second-rate creature, who did nothing but dress up and go out on endless shopping trips, or sit about in the foyers of the big hotels. Then she'd come back and complain because Mr. James didn't make money enough to buy her more expensive dresses and jewels. She was rather attractive looking, or would have been if she hadn't used cosmetics with a trowel.

Just as I was hurrying off to school on that particular morning I stepped on something in the upper hall right in front of Mrs. James's door. I looked down and there was a little pearl-and-diamond brooch that she wore a great deal, not a costly thing, but pretty and in fairly good taste. I snatched it up—I thought I'd broken it, and wasn't I relieved when I found that I'd simply pressed it into the carpet and not even bent it anywhere!

No one answered my rap at Mrs. James's door, and as it was ajar I pushed it open and looked in. No one there.

"Oh, well," I said to myself, "I'll give it to Mrs. Harris to keep until Mrs. James comes back."

So I ran downstairs to Mrs. Harris's sitting-room and she wasn't in, either, and the maid who was sweeping the hall, a dull, middle-aged poor soul who had only been there a few weeks, said that Mrs. Harris had gone to market.

There I was with the pin in my hand and no one to leave it with, and it was high time that I should be on my way to school. At first I thought I'd tell the maid to give Mrs. Harris a message about the pin, but she looked so thick I didn't believe she'd remember it. Down at Mrs. Harris's writing table I

sat and scribbled a line: "Please tell Mrs. James that I found her little pearl pin and am keeping it for her," I wrote, and signed my name, "Leslie Brennan." I folded it, and said to the maid:

"Look, Margaretta, I want Mrs. Harris to have this note as soon as she comes in. It's important. I'll leave it right here." And I laid it right in the middle of the blotter where she'd be sure to see it, and scribbled her name on the front of it in big black letters. Then I tucked Mrs. James's pin in the inner compartment of my purse and flew out and on my way to school.

I don't believe I gave the matter another thought, and when Celia Doherty proposed that we have luncheon together at a coöperative place that some people she knew of had started, and then go and poke about the second-hand book stores for a while, and *then* go and see a secessionist art exhibition away uptown, I said yes, and went right along. We had great fun, too, for the luncheon place was weird—everything we'd ask for they said they were just out of, and finally we got tongue sandwiches, doughnuts, and buttermilk, which is not my idea of a luncheon, nor Celia's, either. The second-hand book store expedition was a great success, for we found a copy

of Pater's "Marius" that Celia wanted, for fifteen cents, and I got three of Synge's plays for twenty. Next came the secessionist art exhibition and we did it thoroughly, trying hard to understand it—but we had to give that up, so we spent the rest of the afternoon there following in the wake of a secessionist painter who was explaining the show to a party of philistine friends. It would be hard to say which was the funnier, his explanations or their comments.

When I finally got back to the house I was hungry, and intended to hurry upstairs and wash my hands and then rush down to dinner; but as I came in I saw a letter for me on the table in the hall. It was in an unfamiliar writing, but I saw that it was postmarked Chicago. "Jimmie Peters has written, after all," I said to myself, and broke it open right then and there.

"Leslie, my dear," it began, "I did not intend to write to you, but the longing to speak to you grew too strong for me to resist. I suppose I am an awful fool, but it is a keen delight to me to think that this little bit of paper here in my hands, that I'm writing on, will be held in your hands, too, and that——"

I broke off reading, for loud and excited voices were coming out from Mrs. Harris's sitting-room. Some

one was sobbing noisily, unrestrainedly, and through the sobs I could hear: "I didn't take it—I swear on a stack of Bibles as high as my head I didn't."

And then, in high-pitched shrillness, "Well, I'm going to have your things searched, and as soon as my husband gets here I'll telephone for a police officer."

And then a perfect babel of voices rose—people talking all at once and the terrible racking sobs still going on. It wasn't until I heard the high-pitched voice saying something about "My pearl-and-diamond pin," and "It was worth three hundred dollars," that it dawned on me that Mrs. James must be the complainant and that somehow she did not know that I had found her pin. I ran back to Mrs. Harris's room.

There stood poor stupid Margaretta, crying as if her heart would break, and beside her was Mrs. Harris, looking terribly distressed. Mrs. James stood before her, red even through her rouge with rage, and one or two other boarders made up the background.

"Here's Miss Brennan," fairly screamed Mrs. James when she caught sight of me, "I call you to witness, Miss Brennan, that this girl here stole my diamond-and-pearl pin, and that she denies it brazenly right here before everybody."

"I never seen her pin," came from the anguished Margaretta.

"Oh, please, please," I cried, "I found your pin, Mrs. James—I found it right outside your door this morning when I was going out." I stopped and opened my bag and took out the pin and handed it to her.

It was just like a play. Every one stared, open-mouthed, and Margaretta stopped sobbing and remarked angrily, "There, now, I told you I never seen your pin—now you see, I guess, that I was tellin' the Gawd's truth, an' nothin' less."

Mrs. James stood still with the pin in her outstretched hand where I had laid it. She looked almost disappointed that it wasn't stolen. I think she had been enjoying the row and resented having such a damper thrown on it. She looked at the pin and then at me, and her glance at me wasn't pleasant.

"What I should like to know," she said suspiciously, "is why you didn't give it to me before. What made you keep it all day—huh?"

Her tone was a positive insult, and I could feel the hot blood just rush to my face. "I shall be very glad to explain," I said, with all the dignity I could. "I

found the pin this morning, and rapped at your door to return it to you, but you had gone out. Then I came downstairs and intended to leave the pin with Mrs. Harris, but she had gone to market. But—I wrote you a note," I cried, turning to Mrs. Harris now, "didn't you find it? I left it on your writing table."

We all turned. The laundress had come upstairs and covered the writing table with clean towels and pillow slips. I went over and lifted some of them, and there, sure enough, was the note, right where I'd laid it. I handed it to Mrs. James. "If you'll read this," I said, "you'll see that I had tried to relieve your anxiety." I could just have killed her, but I still tried to be calm.

Of course Mrs. James took the note and read it, and of course there was nothing left for her to do but apologize. "I'm sure I'm very sorry," she began, stammeringly, "I didn't mean to insinuate—of course—it was a mistake—I was excited, you see, and I'm so nervous. My doctor says I'm just a bundle of nerves anyway."

That was just a little bit too much! I cut her off short:

"You don't need to apologize to me," I said, "but

I do think you should beg Margaretta's pardon, and try to make up to her for accusing her of something she didn't do, when you didn't have a shadow of proof that she did do it."

"She cleans up my room," said Mrs. James, "so of course it was natural I should suspect her."

"Yes, and you'd have tried to send me up if the young lady here hadn't been an angel from heaven to me," broke in Margaretta; "I just wish you'd have had me pinched yet—I'd sue y' for it, I would, quick's wink. A lady frien' of mine got a fine lot of money outa man that had had her pinched when she hadn't done nothin'——"

"There, there, Margaretta," broke in Mrs. Harris, "don't say any more. Everything's all right. Go downstairs to your work. I'm so sorry," she went on to Mrs. James and me, "that this has happened; but isn't it good that it's turned out so well? You've got your brooch, and there's been no stealing done, and now we can forget all about it."

Mrs. James tossed her head. "Well, I want that girl discharged anyway," she said. "She's as impertinent as she can be. If she stays here, I go." And with that she swept out of the room.

Mrs. Harris turned her troubled face to me. "I

was afraid she'd begin that tune," she said, "I've had this same thing happen before, and always the lady wants the maid discharged."

"But it isn't fair—it isn't right," I said; "surely you won't send Margaretta away simply because she was accused of a theft she wasn't guilty of."

"The Jameses have the most expensive double room in the house," she said, "and he pays prompt. There's lots of worse injustice in the world than this, child. Anyway, I think I can get Margaretta another place. But she'll have to go, whether I can or not."

Well, what could any one say! It was Mrs. Harris's bread and butter. She simply couldn't afford to let her best room be empty. The injustice and the meanness of it turned me sick. I went out and up to my room, and I was strongly tempted to stop and speak my mind in full to Mrs. James. How could any woman do such a thing to another! How heartless, how cruel, how unjust, and how unnecessary—that was the very worst of it.

After I'd been in my room a few minutes Margaretta came up.

"I'm much obliged to you, miss," she said, "I guess you come right in the smitch of time for me.

Mrs. James would have had me spending the night in the station, sure, and put through the third degree, an' all the rest of it."

"I'm glad I came in time, Margaretta," I said; "it was dreadful—I don't see how she could."

"Ladies are mostly like that," said that poor drudge, standing there before me, looking more like some worn, dirty piece of household machinery than a human being with a heart and a soul and a divine spirit. "I'll have to be getting another place now."

I talked with her a little more and gave her as much money as I could spare—I didn't care what Minnie would say. It seemed to me so terrible that she should accept the injustice of her treatment in that way, as something that had to be met and reckoned with, but could not be changed. I know how prisoners feel now when they shake their bars and yell, for I wanted to. Margaretta and I were both prisoners, barred in by Mrs. James's injustice and Mrs. Harris's need. Oh, it was all wrong!

After Margaretta had gone and I was sitting there thinking about it all, I looked up at the picture of my father that I had hung on the wall beside the

bed and it seemed to me that his eyes were telling me that I was learning some of the things he had wanted me to learn, and I stood up and said to him out loud, "I'll never knowingly do an unjust or a small thing to any one, no matter who. I promise you that."

The affair had wrought me up so that I had forgotten all about Jimmie Peters's letter, and when I looked down I found it was still in my hand, and I began to read it again. It was strange, but the happenings of the last half hour had changed my feeling altogether about that letter. I seemed to see now, quite clearly, that my pleasure in getting it was only gratified vanity, and so, when I had read it, I put it down with a sigh. "I've got to find some way to make Jimmie forget me," I said, "for that's the kind and the square thing to do for him."

It took a good while for me to get over that James affair, it left scars on my feelings. Minnie was even angrier than I when she heard about it; and the two of us went right to work and never rested until we'd found Margaretta a new place. She was so grateful it was almost embarrassing—as Minnie said, "I feel as if she was a puppy licking

my hand when she goes on like that." It was a great comfort to have Minnie to talk to about Margaretta's case—I only wished I could talk to her about Jimmie—but I didn't think it would be fair and right to Jimmie.

But what was fair and right to Jimmie?—that was the question. I thought about that until I nearly wore my brain cells out. Finally I decided, and I wrote him a long letter—and I toiled over it. I told him how much I liked him, and how much I missed him, and how much his companionship had been to me. But—I thought it was the best thing that he should not write to me again, for it would only keep alive his feeling for me that I could not return. It was a nice letter, but it was firm; for I knew it wasn't right to let him keep on writing and getting answers from me when he felt the way he did. He'd just think I was encouraging him, and when he finally realized that I couldn't care for him he'd feel that I'd played with his feelings. I hated to do it, for I did miss Jimmie, and I'd like to have kept in touch with him; but I wouldn't do it when it only meant that I'd have to tell him "no" all over again. So, with that letter stamped and sent, I just pitched in on my school lessons

and my language work and fairly ground at them. They were not so much fun as flirting with Jimmie would have been, but they didn't give me a guilty conscience. Books are so much safer than men.

## CHAPTER VI

WHEN I approached the end of my work in school, some of the old doubts and fears that I had felt when I started it began to find me. I had moments of feeling very small and unprepared to earn my own living, and as if I would never be very efficient or successful. Just as if to prove to me how little I knew about any one, for I'd thought her so stupid and common, Miss Trippe, my teacher, was the one to put confidence in me. She drew me one side, mysteriously, just a few days before I finished the course, and with her eyes shining behind her big-rimmed glasses, she said to me, rather diffidently:

"You've been very quick, Miss Brennan, very quick, indeed. I don't know that I ever had a pupil who was more quick, after getting the hang of the work. Lots of people start off well, but it doesn't last. As the proverb says, 'A good beginning often makes a poor ending.' Now I want to tell you that I think you ought to get a very good place

if you go at it in the right way. You're different class from most of the girls who come here—I saw that the very first day—and you've been educated differently. You know languages, and you're well-read and refined. Don't you hunt for a regular office place, but try to get a private secretaryship, a real one. Lots of people call their stenographers 'private secretary,' but it doesn't signify anything but that they want to put on airs. Still, there are plenty of people, real important people, who are just crazy to get intelligent, good-class girls for private secretaries. I don't mean for you to hunt a place with a society woman, for those jobs are hard and thankless, but you get with some live business man or big professional man where your class will be appreciated. You might take up law later, if you get into a lawyer's office—lots of girls do it, and though they don't get admitted to the bar, they are worth high salaries to their employers. I want to tell you, too, don't let anybody get fresh with you—not that I think you *will*, but it's as well to remember it. And, wherever you are, don't get into a rut. Keep your eye on your employer every minute to see if there isn't some new way you can help him. He'll appreciate it. Lots

of girls get into a rut and think all there is to a job is taking letters in a notebook and writing them on the typewriter. That's only the beginning. And listen—don't be afraid to accept responsibility. If you see your employer wants something done, make a try at it, even if you're not sure you can do it. Now, you keep your eyes open and take your own part and you'll get along—as quick as anything. My, that's a regular lecture," she wound up, smiling.

She looked so kind and funny that I put my arms around her and gave her a real hug. "You're a perfect dear, Miss Trippe," I said, "and if I get a good job I'll owe it to you and your patience. It's good of you to tell me I was quick at first, but I wasn't, and I know it. I do appreciate your taking all this trouble to help me, indeed, I do, and as soon as I get a job I'm going to come in and tell you all about it and see if you approve. And I promise you I'll remember everything you've told me, and what's more I'll do exactly as you've said—as well as I can."

So that was the way we parted—beaming at each other. I took my "diploma" from the business school in my hand and went right out and bought

all the afternoon papers to see what advertisements of "Stenographer Wanted" there might be in them that would meet with Miss Trippe's requirements —and mine, for by this time I had accumulated a few ideas of my own about jobs and the hunting of them.

For instance, I did not mean to get my job through the influence of any one. Uncle Bob had sent me a long list of business people he knew and a great bunch of letters of introduction, to help me. Mrs. Alex sent me some letters, too, and they both wrote me pages and pages and pages of advice and admonition and warning and direction until I very ungratefully got tired of reading them. They seemed to think that I was the same foolish, swathed-in-cotton-wool girl who had left them to come to New York. I took all the letters they sent and put them away in my trunk in a neat package, and made up my mind to use them only as a last resort. I'd get *my* job *myself*.

Every day I'd go at the advertisements as the first resource; and I entered my name in some agencies which make a business of placing stenographers and secretaries. I put an advertisement of my own in several of the best papers, and presently

I found my day taken up with going to see people who had answered my "ad," and people whose "ads" I had answered. Some were obviously fakes—places where you'd have to work several days without pay—"To see if we like your work," they'd say, and that meant that at the end of the time they'd have a lot of work done and then they'd tell you that you didn't suit and they'd decided not to keep you on. Celia said that lots of horrid little business firms get all their stenography and typing done that way. It's a mean trick.

Some of the places I went to were so dirty and ill-ventilated that I just gave them one look and went away. Some had bad, old-fashioned equipment, and I decided that I'd not work anywhere where things were not at least reasonably up-to-date. At one place, the man who interviewed me was a horrid person and called me "girlie," and told me that he always got along well with the pretty girls—but he was the only one of that kind I met. The pay was too small at some of the places—in fact, there was some reason for saying no to all of them.

I had been going about looking for a week, was beginning to get discouraged, and had about decided

that I'd take any fairly good place that came along and then watch for a better chance, when one morning, as I looked through the "Want Ads" in the *Times*, I saw this:

WANTED: a stenographer who can take accurate notes and transcribe them without mistakes. Must not be silly or easily scared. Must not have red hair. Must have a pleasant voice and be able to write and speak three languages including good English. Middle-aged woman preferred who has common sense and knows how to use it. Good salary. Call between nine and ten on Tuesday morning.

Now wasn't that the strangest, foolishest advertisement! I wondered if I could muster three languages, and remembered what Miss Trippe said about making a try at things even if I wasn't sure I could do them. Then I looked at the address—it was away up in the Bronx and it was then nearly nine o'clock and the day was Tuesday. I wasn't middle-aged, but at least I didn't have red hair. I should have liked to show the advertisement to Minnie, but she had gone to work, and so I put on my hat and hurried away to the Subway.

There were several girls and women who got off

the Subway where I did, and as I sized them up I was sure they had come to answer the advertisement just as I had. We all streamed up the stairs and out of the station together, and pretended to be quite unaware of one another, meanwhile taking furtive peeps. We found ourselves in a very new part of the city indeed, with a few apartment houses going up here and there, and a few very small, cheap shanties, a few nice old houses, and lots and lots of bill-boards. The street signs were missing, but a policeman, looking very humorous, directed us: *Two blocks. A big house with lots of trees. You couldn't miss it.* And then he twirled his club and marched on, looking even more humorous.

So the whole party straggled off, still casting surreptitious glances of suspicion and dislike on one another. There was a fat blonde in purple plush, and a severe-looking, cross-eyed lady with a hat all over spiky feathers, and some young things, certainly no longer out of business school than I was. I wondered if they all knew three languages and had pleasant voices—and I had "ma doots." I could hardly keep my face straight when I looked at the purple-plush blonde.

Some one of us rang the bell of the "big house with

trees around," and it *was* a beautiful old house, only not very well kept up, and after a little wait we were admitted. We were shown into a bare sort of old-fashioned parlour, without a vacant seat, for the reason that several dozen other applicants were there before us. We stood about for a few minutes and then a pleasant-looking old manservant in shirt sleeves brought in chairs that had obviously been recruited from all over the house. I got a stately high-backed chair that probably came from the hall, while the purple-plush blonde got a little bedroom chair that creaked when she sat down on it. I looked over at her and I saw she wasn't comfortable, so I said, "Let's exchange chairs."

She gave a good-natured smile, and sighed with relief as she took my chair. "Thanks, dearie," she said, "I never was built to sit on bric-a-brac." I treasured that to tell Minnie.

We had waited a few minutes, when a door opened and a young man stuck his head in. He looked so scared and so cross, and he had such flaming red hair I wanted to laugh more than ever. It didn't seem to me as though I was hunting a job at all—more as if I was in amateur theatricals with people out of "Alice in Wonderland." If the Mad Hatter or the

White Queen had suddenly popped in it wouldn't have surprised me in the least.

The red-headed young man looked us over with a sort of angry despair in his glance, and then he snapped out: "Begin over here and come in one by one."

Then there was a scramble to get nearest to "over here," but the old servant came in and marshalled us into an irregular line. The door opened, and the first one was admitted into the inner sanctum. The young red-headed man must have made short work of her, for in a minute another was admitted. So we went in and, really, as fast as one left the parlour two more came in. Every Subway and Elevated train must have brought a dozen or more. They were every age and every size and some were queer and some were very pitiful.

After waiting almost an hour my turn came at last, and I was ushered through the door where so many had preceded me, into a small room fitted up as an office. Behind a big, flat desk sat the red-headed young man looking more scared and cross than ever. He had on over his suit a garment that might have been a linen duster or a laboratory apron—but it was evidently the latter, for it was all stained and spotted and had holes burned in it. I felt more like

an "Alice in Wonderland" person than ever when I saw him.

"You're not middle-aged," he said, looking at me defiantly, as though he dared me to try to prove otherwise.

It seemed so ridiculous that I could hardly keep from laughing out loud. "But I'm not red-headed, and I'm a very accurate stenographer, and I'm not easily scared, and I'm not silly, and I have a pleasant voice," I answered. "That was what you advertised for, and you only said 'middle-aged woman preferred,' you didn't say she'd have to be middle-aged."

"Why—why—that's true," said the red-headed young man. "But what about languages? What do you know besides English, and do you know English?"

"I can read and write French and German," I said, "and I have a smattering of Spanish. As to English—well, I'm not specially brilliant, but—I'm fairly grammatical, I think."

"You think—you think," said the red-headed young man irascibly; "don't you *know?*" Then, without giving me time to answer that, he snapped out: "What's your name?"

"Leslie Brennan," I said, beginning to feel a little red-headed myself. "What's yours?"

"Humph, you're Irish," he replied. "My name's Ewan Kennedy."

"Humph, you're Scotch," I said. I had, of course, not the slightest hope of getting the place, but I wasn't going to be talked to in that rude, off-hand way and let him get away with it.

A flicker of—was it amusement?—it was certainly interest—came into his deep eyes. He looked me over from head to feet and I looked him over at the same time, just as coolly. Then I glanced about the room at the bookshelves, the file cases, the big office desk and chair that looked so out of place with the fine old panelled wall. I was just making up my mind that this room had been a little breakfast room when the old mansion was used as a residence, when Mr. Kennedy, evidently feeling that he had to say something more to the impertinent applicant for position as secretary, spoke again:

"I am a chemist," he said, "and I am making a series of experiments. Sometimes there are explosions, small ones—I give you my word there's no real danger—and I want a secretary who won't scream and run out on the street every time she hears

a noise in my laboratory. It's annoying to me and it invariably ends in my having to get another secretary."

"What is the salary you offer?" I asked, wondering if he paid enough to make it worth while not to scream and run.

"I paid the last girl eighteen dollars a week," he answered, doubtfully. "If I were sure I was getting some one who was efficient and not idiotically nervous—I might make it twenty."

"Twenty dollars a week is the least I could accept," I said, repressing a desire to dance around the room. Twenty dollars! Most beginners get eight or ten, and some get only six. Besides, it was five dollars more a week than my present allowance.

My words seemed to make quite an impression on Mr. Kennedy. He really seemed to be considering me. "Can you answer letters without dictation," he asked, "and make 'em sound all right? I hate to dictate."

"Try me!" I said, and with that I sat down, for all this time he had been sitting and I standing.

Mr. Kennedy stared at me again, and I again stared back.

"I *will* try you," he said, "I haven't asked you half

what I ought, and I certainly wanted an older woman, but you look as if you had sense, and you're certainly spunky." He went to a back door. "Hi, George," he called, "send 'em all away and don't let any more in. The place is filled."

Now did any one ever hear of such an absurd, unbusinesslike proceeding as this, about as far removed as possible from what I had pictured when I thought about getting my first job. I had imagined a short, stout man, elderly, with mutton-chop whiskers, head of a big railroad or corporation or something like that, whose secretary—a man—has just failed him in some crucial moment and who had thereupon determined to hire a woman, saying, as they always do in stories and big-business magazine articles, that a woman is more faithful and more honest, and, by Jove, he would try one. That was the sort of scene I had planned for my first job, and this was certainly different. But, anyway, I had the job and a salary of twenty dollars a week, and with what Uncle Bob had promised me when I went to work—five dollars—that made twenty-five dollars a week, and I had visions of a larger room, and more comforts, and my occasional small luxuries becoming quite semi-occasional.

"You'll have to go to work right away," said Mr. Kennedy. "Here, read those letters and dope out answers to 'em and then let me see 'em." He scooped up a mighty armful of loose papers and pushed them over toward me.

"Where's my desk?" I asked, taking the papers and looking about the room, for there was just the one desk and he was sitting at it.

"Desk—desk?" he said vaguely. "Oh, yes! Right here, of course." He got up and waved me to his chair. Then I saw that there was a place for a typewriter in the middle part that he had kept covered with letters. "I don't sit at any desk," he went on, "I'm back here in the laboratory. You'll have to see all the people who come. I can't be bothered."

He said this in exactly the tone a very bad, spoiled little boy might have used.

It seemed my cue to become exceedingly businesslike, since I was beginning to earn my salary. "Very well," I said, and put the papers down again on the desk. I took off my hat and coat and hung them up on a clothes tree that stood in one corner of the room; and Mr. Kennedy, apparently glad to have the matter settled, vanished into, supposedly, the laboratory.

As I was looking through the desk to see what supplies were there—stationery, carbon paper, pencils, notebooks, and the like—and what condition the machine might be in, in came the old manservant who had brought chairs for the multitude. He was muttering to himself, but when he caught sight of me, he stopped, put his head on one side like a wise bird, and regarded me most commiseratingly.

"So you're the one he picked, now," he said, "and after all he said about having no more of the young things about. Well, 'tis not likely you'll be here long, the dear Lord knows. He hasn't had a sicrety f'r three months now, and wan a week was the av'rage f'r dear knows how long before that. Twicet he hollered at thim. Three times there was things exploded in the lab'ratory ferninst there. Four was fired because they cuddent spell. And there was some tried to flirt with 'im, and some that axed questions unending. Now ye know what ye're up against, Miss, dear, and it's but right I should tell ye, f'r y'r a purty young thing entirely."

"It sounds dreadful," I said, brushing away at the typewriter keys as hard as I could. They were simply caked solid with dirt. I don't see how any one could have let them get so dirty.

The old man came closer. "Whist—ye don't know the worst of it yet, at all, at all. 'Tis a kind of giant gunpowder he's inventin' beyant there, an' any minute it may explode tremenjus an' blow us all to flinders. It's the bare truth I'm tellin' ye."

## CHAPTER VII

IT GAVE me a queer little shiver of fright up my back when old George announced so ominously that we might be "blown to flinders" at any moment, but before I had time to say how much he had scared me I caught a sidewise gleam in his eye and—I wondered. Perhaps he had only been instructed to tell me that very thing in order to test my courage. Two can play that sort of a game as easily as one, so I didn't look up again, but brushed away at the typewriter keys harder than ever and tried to look as though being blown to flinders was an everyday matter with me.

"That's too bad," I ventured at last, in an unconcerned tone, "but since you're Irish like myself, I don't believe you'd let me get into any real danger, would you?"

"Praise be!" cried George, "and are ye Irish, now! I was just thinkin' to mesilf as how ye looked exthra intilligent! And where in Ireland are ye from, Miss, dear?"

He leaned over the desk with eager friendliness, his old eyes shining.

"I'm one remove from the old sod," I said, playing on his eagerness. "'Twas my father was the real Irish. He was born in Dublin and never came to America until he was nearly grown up."

"Fr'm Dublin way, is it!" said George, delighted. "Think of that, now! an' I'm fr'm Dublin way meself. Where is your father, Miss, may I be askin', and what's his name, to be sure?"

"My father's name was Charles Brennan," I answered, "and he—died when I was ten years old." My lip quivered a little, for I can't talk about Father without missing him—I don't think I shall ever be able to stop missing him.

Instantly George was all kindness. "It's a sorrowful old fool I am," he reproached himself, "to be reminding you of the grief on your heart, an' you the young an' purty creature must earn your bread. It's desthroyed I am wit' shame at meself. I ask y'r pardon, Miss, I do, entirely, and I'll be off to my work, f'r the masther will be wantin' me, like as not, anny minute. I'll pass by frequent, though, an' if there's annything I c'n do f'r ye, ye've only to speak it. An' whist, Miss, don't be scared

if annything blows up beyant there—it may make a noise, but it won't hurt ye."

So it was as I had suspected—George had been sent to see if I was likely to scream and run at the first excitement. I had a small chuckle all to myself when he had gone out, and then, as soon as the typewriter was clean and oiled and ready for work, I fell on the mass of letters that Mr. Kennedy had handed over to me, and began my first work for real pay. Twenty dollars a week, too! Think of that! I wanted to think of it so much that I could hardly put my mind on that heaping pile of brown, blue, and white papers.

But with the very first letter that I fished out of the heap and read, my inattention vanished. There, under my hand, was a whole new world, a big world, too, with big people in it. I read and I read and I read, one letter after another, first slowly and then rapidly, as my interest deepened. I began to realize a little bit who my strange employer was, and what he was doing.

There were letters in French and letters in German, as well as many, many letters in English. I found only one letter in Spanish, and I was thankful for that. It became clear, as I read, that the

cross red-headed young Scotchman who had hired me so casually was a very well-known man and, so far as I could judge, a great many people in places of eminence kept an eye on him constantly. He had evidently made some notable discoveries in the line of high explosives, and various foreign governments were using them. There were some magnificent officially sealed and imposingly headed letters to prove it.

Furthermore, a number of people not connected in any official way with any government seemed to want to be appointed his agent and negotiate for him the sale of a formula of a certain new explosive which he was apparently working on and had not yet made public. It was all very exciting! But how to get those letters in proper order! And what to do with them when I'd got them in order! To tell the truth I didn't have the slightest idea where or how to begin, and so I sorted out the whole mass in quite a childish way.

First I got together all the letters that came from recognized governments, and divided them into those which were concerned with former inventions, and those which were concerned with future ones. I put those two piles of letters over on the far side

of the desk. Then I sorted out all the would-be agents: there were so many I finally divided them in three lots—those who wanted money advanced right away; those who wanted no money now, but a commission when they had sold the new explosive formula, and finally, those who were willing to pay for being made the agent. These three piles of letters I laid neatly along the top of the desk, just beyond the government ones. All, of course, I arranged in chronological order.

This left a queer residue. There were tailors' bills, grocers' bills, rent bills, coal bills, and no end of chemists' and manufacturers' bills. There were great quantities of circulars, describing all sorts of wares, from smoking tobacco to motor cars, and I dumped all of them into the wastebasket. There were lists of price quotations of various strange materials—I suppose they were the stuffs that explosives are made of—so I saved all of those by themselves. Finally there were a few personal letters from various friends—all men: one from Glasgow, one from—of all places—Java, two from Montreal, one from Kansas City. The last letter of all, postmarked Toronto, was in a wavering handwriting, and when I pulled it out of its envelope it

began "My dear son Ewan." Of course I put it right back and didn't read another word of it; but it was clear to me now that he had a mother and didn't take the trouble to read her letters! It made me awfully disgusted with him. He really hadn't seemed that sort.

With the letters all sorted and classified, I rested on my labours a few moments, and, oh, my gracious, but I was hungry. I'd been too busy to notice it before. No wonder, for when I looked at my watch it was after two o'clock! I left the letters lying as they were, and got up and put on my hat and coat, opened the office door, and entered the big bare parlour where I had waited with the others that morning, who had not been so lucky as I.

All of the extra chairs had been taken away and a few pieces of furniture put in place—an old-fashioned square piano, and a quaint sofa, and a funny round centre table with a beaded plush cover. I looked about me to make sure which was the door into the hall, when suddenly another door opened and in popped a severe little old woman, with shoulder shawl and apron, her arms folded for all the world like the bad little old witch in the pantomimes Mrs. Alex used to take me to see.

"An' what are ye doin' here?" she asked severely.

"I'm Mr. Kennedy's new secretary," I answered very meekly, too, for I didn't know but she might whisk me away with her broomstick, "and I'm just going out to get something to eat."

"Do I hear meself!" cried the little old woman, more enraged than before. "And that rascal George niver told me one word that you're here! Go back to your desk, me dear, an' in a whisk I'll have ye a bite and sup, f'r there's no place around here where the likes of you should be eatin'."

With that she vanished and I was left to marvel further on my employer's queer staff of servants, and also on the fact that luncheon was evidently included with my "job." I didn't want to go back to my desk right away—I felt tired and a little dull. "I believe," I said to myself, "that I'll just run out and get a little fresh air." So I hurried through the parlour and out of the front door to the walk between the big, bare trees. It was cold and windy, so after making sure that no one could see me from the street, I ran up and down the walk as hard as I could, half a dozen times, and came back into the house all a-tingle, and feeling, like Alice in Wonderland, "curiouser and curiouser" about my new place.

I had hardly got my coat and hat off again, and sat down at my desk, when in whisked the little old woman with a tray—bacon and eggs and toast and tea, a great yellow pear, and a glass of jelly. She set it down in front of me with a thump.

"There, now," she said, "I know 'tis a bit like breakfast, an' if George had told me ye were here I'd have had ye a chop and a baked potato and a wee custard. Oh, but he's the rare forgetful one, is George! Set to it, dearie—ye're like enough starved."

Out she whisked again after this tirade, before I could get a chance to ask her anything, but I was so hungry I "set to it" without waiting to be inquisitive. Moreover, I remembered those among my predecessors who had, according to George, "asked questions unending," and had been summarily fired therefor, and I made up my mind that I would hold my tongue unless things got too tantalizing. There's a limit to what any woman's curiosity will stand.

I was about halfway through my luncheon and enjoying it very much when the door to the laboratory opened and my strange employer—still in his stained old linen duster—looked in. He seemed not so cross now.

"Hullo," he said, quite humanly, "did Mrs. O'Malley fix you up some luncheon?"

"Yes, thank you," I answered. "I had just started out to find a restaurant when she stopped me and insisted on getting this tray for me. I shan't put her to this inconvenience again, though. I'll bring my luncheon after this." I didn't want him to think I expected any extras.

"Nothing of the sort," interrupted Mr. Kennedy rudely. "If you eat cold food at noon you'll be ill, or at least no good for work. Mrs. O'Malley always serves luncheon to my secretaries. That's included."

So it was as I had suspected. I said nothing, though it seemed to me all of a piece with the other queernesses I'd encountered in this house since morning. Mr. Kennedy now came into my office and looked at the piles of letters on the desk. "What have you been doing?" he asked abruptly, and in a tone that indicated that whatever I had done it wasn't the right thing.

I had my mouth full of pear at that moment, and couldn't say a word without choking, and I made such desperate efforts to swallow that Mr. Kennedy permitted his face a twitch of amusement. I felt

somewhat encouraged by that, it showed he was human, and he had been so extraordinarily snappish and angry looking up to now that I'd doubted it. I got the pear down at last with a gulp and answered him in a somewhat choked voice:

"I have classified the letters roughly and arranged them according to date, the oldest ones at the top. If you will glance at them and give me some idea of what your answers are to be, I will draft letters of reply which you can read and correct. Then I can go ahead and write them all and get them out." I was proud of that, it sounded so businesslike and secretary-ish. It evidently impressed Mr. Kennedy, for he looked squarely at me for the first time since he had been in the room, and again his gaze was almost human.

"I say," he said, "you've got the right idea, you know. You must be quite an old hand at this sort of work. That reminds me—I don't believe I asked you this morning: How much experience *have* you had? You look like a schoolgirl."

Miss Trippe had said that a woman in business must always promptly discourage personal remarks. So I looked as grave as possible although I'll own that I felt rather foolish, and I answered with

dignity: "This is my first position, but at the business school where I studied we were taught the duties of a secretary as part of our regular work."

Then seeing that I had evidently quite awed him with that stiff bit of information, I went on: "There are a large number of unpaid bills here, and some very determined and unpleasant demands for payment. Do you wish me to make out checks for these bills and send them out? If so, kindly tell me where your checkbook is, and I will have the checks made out and ready for you to sign before I go home."

Without a word he walked over to a closed bookcase that stood against the wall and opened it. After digging about among the books he found a bank book and a big checkbook and handed them over. By this time I was feeling almost too grand for words. *Wasn't* I the real thing in secretaries, though, attending to my employer's checks! And five months before I hardly knew how to make out a check properly!

"Thank you," I said briskly, like a business woman on the stage. "I'll get at these at once. Now just one thing more. Here are some personal letters, including one from your mother, evidently. I found

them among all this other stuff and opened them, but of course didn't read them. I am very sorry, but it shan't happen again, for I'll know the handwritings after this."

Then my opinion of Mr. Ewan Kennedy went up with a jump. His face lightened wonderfully and even his red hair didn't seem so red. He just grabbed that package of letters and pulled out his mother's the first thing and beamed at me. "That old villain George!" he said. "I've been worried to death at not hearing from my mother this week and I was just on the point of wiring to find out whether or not she was ill. George dumps all the mail down here and that's the end of it so far as he's concerned, and when I looked for it I suppose I missed it and shoved it under this mess of stuff. Thank you very much, for finding it, Miss Brennan."

He opened the letter and began to read it as if it was a love-letter, and when he had finished it he looked quite like another man, so pleasant and friendly. Of course, he was awfully untidy, and his hair was rumpled until you might have thought he'd never seen a brush or comb, but he honestly was almost good-looking, or would have been if he'd been properly dressed. I was so pleased with him for

being so glad to hear from his mother that I felt ever so much more easy in my mind about being his secretary. I had been feeling dubious, everything about the place was so unlike any secretary's job I'd ever heard or read about.

As soon as he got through reading his mother's letter and had looked through the other personal ones, I handed him the first lot of correspondence. Immediately his face clouded again.

"Have I got to dictate answers to all that?" he asked in evident dismay.

"If you will just write a few words in pencil on each, indicating what sort of answer you wish to make," I answered in my most secretarial voice, "I will draft replies for your inspection, as I said, and you can make the necessary changes. I think that would be the best way, for it will keep me from making so many mistakes."

With that I handed him a pencil, so there was nothing more for him to do but to get to work. He snatched the pencil out of my hand and ran through the letters more quickly than I had thought any living human being *could* read, marking them "No," mostly, but here and there "under consideration." All of the agents' letters he marked "No." Then he

flung the whole lot down and stalked off to the laboratory without another word.

He was hardly out of the room when in came my old Irishwoman again, smiling this time, and looking at my empty tray with great satisfaction.

"An' how was y'r lunch, me dear?" she asked.

"Delicious," I answered, and I meant it. "You see I've eaten up every bit."

She picked up the tray, smiling still more broadly. "Now don't be workin' too hard," she said. "He may fume a bit—but let 'im." And she wagged her head knowingly at the laboratory. Evidently here was some one who didn't take Mr. Kennedy's thunders seriously.

I was going to make her a nice Little Rollo reply about loving my work, when she slipped away. It was positively uncanny how people appeared and disappeared in that house. Still, I thought, I'd better not reflect too much on *that*, so I began on the checks.

By looking over his bank book I discovered that my strange employer was far from being a pauper. He had a really wealthy-looking balance to his credit, so I made out a check for every bill in sight. There were certainly a lot of them, but none of them was so very large. His former secretaries must not

have been allowed to attend to his banking, and it was clear that he paid little attention to such a trifle himself. By four o'clock I had everything ready, checks made out, ready to be signed, each one with bill and envelope for mailing, and they looked *fine*. I put them all neatly together in a wire basket and then got up and opened the laboratory door, for I had been dying to see in there all day.

Such a mess! A big bare room, probably once the dining-room, with high, uncurtained windows. Rows of cabinets or cases full of shelves lined the walls, and they were filled with bottles and boxes and packages of all shapes and sizes. There were tools, queer ones, on the lower shelves. There were two rough big tables with shelves built right down the middle above them, and one had gas jets and a sink set into it. A low, heavy stand had a complicated black machine on it, though for what purpose it was intended I had not the slightest idea. There were a lot of shells of different sizes in a rack near one of the tables, but there were no guns, which I had confidently expected to see. I had thought there would be blue smoke and a smell of gunpowder, too, but there was nothing of the sort, only a distinct odour of strong chemicals about, a sort of drug-store-mixed-with-

garage smell. On a high stool before one of the tables was Mr. Kennedy, all sprawled down over some sheets of yellow paper on which he seemed to be figuring wildly, up and down. He glanced up as I entered.

"What do you mean by coming in here without knocking?" he said, looking again exactly like a bad, mad, rude little boy. "You ought to know better than that."

It was so unexpected and so dreadfully rough and unnecessary that I felt myself get all red with rage. "You didn't knock before entering my office," I answered, "and though I beg your pardon for not knocking, you didn't tell me to knock. And if you didn't want to be disturbed you ought to have locked the door," I said finally, standing my ground. "I came in to tell you I have your checks ready for you to sign and I'd like to send them out to-night."

With that I shut the door and retreated to my desk, wondering if he would come right in and fire me on the spot. I fully expected it. I sat there a few minutes, and presently there came a knock at the door. "Come in," I said, trying not to smile, and in walked red-headed Mr. Kennedy, looking rather ashamed of himself, but still crossish.

"Where are those checks?" he demanded. I produced them forthwith, also a pen, and he signed them with a scratchy, illegible signature. When he was signing the last one I said, still very secretarial: "What office hours do you wish me to keep, Mr. Kennedy?"

"Nine to five," he said, "and be here on time, too." With that speech he turned about and went back to the laboratory. It sounds very rude and disagreeable as I write it down, but, truly, he was so like a bad boy I couldn't be a bit angry. It seemed more like a joke than a reproof. Why, he wasn't so much older than Jimmie Peters—imagine Jimmie Peters speaking to me like that! As for Ranny Heeth, his manners, generally speaking, were perfect, but of course he was such a cad he'd have said anything to any girl when his veneer of fine manners was off. But even though Mr. Kennedy was rude he wasn't caddish, not a bit. As I thumped the last envelope to make it stick, I said to myself, "Yes, I like him." And I meant it.

## CHAPTER VIII

THAT night it seemed to me that I could hardly wait to get back to Mrs. Harris's and tell Minnie about my new job. The Subway seemed to crawl—and the Subway's specialty decidedly is not crawling. Finally, however, I got there, and when dinner was over, Minnie and I flew upstairs and I acted the whole thing out—the mob of would-be secretaries, not forgetting the substantial fairy in purple plush, Mr. Kennedy's first appearance, old George, Mrs. O'Malley, and I—everything we said and did. It was heaps of fun. Minnie was properly impressed by my salary, with luncheon thrown in, but she urged me to find out as much as I could about Mr. Kennedy and his business.

"For," she said, wisely, "you never can tell. He may be a counterfeiter or some sort of an anarchist, and the whole place may be pinched some day and you along with it. That explosive story may be nothing but a blind to hide his real business.

Believe me, you'd better leave no stone unturned to find out what he's really up to. It's too queer —I don't like the look of it."

"But, Minnie," I said, "there are all those letters; he can't have faked those, you know. He doesn't look or seem a bit like an anarchist or a counterfeiter or anything shady, and I can't believe he's doing anything criminal with that great big house and a policeman going along the street every few minutes."

"Maybe not," said Minnie, "but you'd better be on the lookout. If it wasn't the busy season I'd go up there and give that whole outfit the once-over myself, just to play safe."

"Well, there's one sure thing, Minnie," I said at last, thinking hard, "he may be doing something queer, but I'll know for certain when I've had answers to the letters I wrote. He can't fake letters *from* the British War Office, and I shall see the mail before he does, you see. Those letters he has may be shams, but if I answer them, and get the right sort of answers back again, I'll know they are all right."

"I get you," said Minnie; "yes, you're right about that. There isn't any way he could fake letters

from King George and Queen Mary, when you see them first."

All the same, though I had stood up for Mr. Kennedy, I intended to take Minnie's warning and investigate as much as I could without asking too many questions and seeming to pry into things. I went to bed and dreamed Sherlock Holmes and Arsène Lupin all night long!

But in the morning, when I had made my long trip uptown and hurried through the sunny streets to the big old house in the Bronx where my "counterfeiter-anarchist" worked, it all seemed foolish even to dream about. I was on time, a little ahead of time, and old George, who was sweeping the walk, greeted me as if I were an old friend.

"God bless the Irish," he returned to my good morning. Then Mrs. O'Malley looked in as I was taking out the typewriter and nodded to me quite welcomingly and asked me if I'd like a scrap of chocolate cake with my lunch now. Lastly, Mr. Kennedy himself sauntered in from the laboratory about ten o'clock and positively forgot to scowl! He had on a clean but ragged linen duster. I call it clean, but it was stained from neck to hem with stains no washwoman could ever hope to eradicate.

He said good morning almost amiably, and when I told him that I needed various typewriting supplies he told me to order what I liked by telephone and not to bother him about it.

"I shall have drafts of answers to some of these letters ready for you directly," I told him, importantly.

To which he responded, "Oh, no hurry," so pleasantly I almost fell off the little typewriter chair. And when he was leaving the room, he turned back and looked at me in an embarrassed way and said, "I was awf'ly upset and worried yesterday," which I suppose he meant as an apology for being cross and abrupt.

I had very little time to think about what he meant, or to chuckle over his idea of an apology, for I had to get up some sort of answers to those formidable letters. I nearly *died* over them. I worked so hard that I could feel myself aging, and growing wrinkled and gray-haired, it was so hard to say anything that sounded adequate or sensible or businesslike. I had learned no forms at business school that were applicable to those letters. Twenty times I was ready to throw them all down and go in and tell Mr. Kennedy that I would have to

give it up, and then—I was just ashamed to do it. It seemed to me that this was my chance to prove, not only to him, but to my doubtful, distrustful self, that I was capable of doing *real* work, just like thousands of other girls—real work, worth my pay. Oh, I just *dug* at those old letters. Learning shorthand was a-b-c to this!

To begin with, some of them were in French and some of them were in German—to say nothing of the one lonesome Spanish one—and I had to write out translations first, and that was dreadful, for the writers of those letters had said nothing about "Shall the boy bring the new pen to his desk?" or "Show me your ring with the blue stone," or "Have you seen the green slippers of my father's aunt?" or any similar remarks such as my dear old wornout exercise books had been full of. Business vocabularies of foreign languages are about as different from the reading and speaking vocabularies we all learn at school as can possibly be imagined.

There were dictionaries in the bookcase and with them as first aid I limped along. Finally, I was pretty sure that I had arrived at the right sense of them, though there wasn't much elegance in my translations. I had been sitting looking at them

with the feeling that I had expended my last ounce of gray matter on those translations when a perfectly overwhelming thought struck me! Would Mr. Kennedy expect me to write answers in French and German and Spanish? At that I decided that I would indeed have to give up, for life wouldn't be worth living if I had to do *that.* Finally, common sense told me that since he was a Scotchman they'd probably be glad enough to have him use English, omitting all such phrases as "hoot, mon," or "I'm greetin' sair," which seem to be the best Scotch, if one may judge by modern fiction.

At last, when it was almost noon and I felt just about in shreds, I had two or three replies written out to my satisfaction, and so, to find out whether or not I was on the right track, I thought I'd better ask Mr. Kennedy to look at them. I went over to the laboratory door and mindful of my experience of the day before, I knocked. Evidently my employer had lapsed back into savagery for he fairly snarled, "Keep out!"

Oh, well, I kept out. I had plenty of things to do—a few dozen more letters, for instance. Then Mrs. O'Malley brought me in a delicious luncheon, and I ate it—she said it was a pleasure for her to

cook for a young leddy wit' a foine healthy appetite. Then I drafted some more replies; then, by way of diversion and resting my poor, tired, over-exerted brain, I looked through the files a bit, for some of the letters mentioned previous correspondence.

This very cursory going over of the files convinced me that Mr. Kennedy was no counterfeiter, as Minnie had suggested. It became more and more evident to me that he was an inventor of some note—not only of powders and explosives, but queer sorts of things that have to do with the firing apparatus of guns. It was infinitely more exciting than if he had been a mere counterfeiter, or an anarchist. I began to hope that some day when he was not feeling such a barbarian he'd let me talk to him and ask some questions about his work. I fairly boiled and bubbled with questions! About machine guns and detonators and other strange things I'd never heard of before.

But when he finally did stalk out of the laboratory, I knew better than to ask him anything. Oh, but he was dark and gloomy! He looked at the replies to the letters I had worked so hard over, slashed into them here and there, and stalked back in glum silence to the laboratory. I had to swallow

my unasked questions, and I was dying to talk, too! But I reminded myself severely that I was a working woman and must take life as I found it, also employers. General conversation on irrelevant topics with employers was of course to be avoided (see Miss Trippe's speech of admonition and advice), but it wouldn't have been out of place at all for Mr. Kennedy to tell me a few little things to help me with my work.

Despite his persistent silence, however, I made some discoveries in the days that followed about Ewan Kennedy, Esq., some time of Scotland and now of New York, besides the obvious facts that he was quick-tempered, red-headed, and an inventor. Some things George told me and some things Mrs. O'Malley told me and some things I found out from his letters. For one thing, I learned that he had a sister Margaret, otherwise Mrs. Henry Ross, who lived in Toronto, and it was with her that his mother stayed. Also, that he was a devoted son and a very good sort of brother.

Moreover, the whole Kennedy connection, including the Rosses, were very well-to-do, and there was no real necessity for him to grub away in a dirty laboratory except that he loved it. I suspected,

though, that anything he wanted to do he went ahead and did, regardless of who or what might try to say him nay.

Also I found out that he had chosen to live in New York because it was so convenient for him to get supplies for the various things he was working on, and as he was a perfectly impossible lodger for a hotel or boarding-house, for he was bound to make his dwelling his workshop, and since no business building would let him rent a place for making his experiments, he had hit on the plan of leasing this great old house, because the estate that owned it couldn't sell it, and the heirs were crazy to get an income from it. Crazy, indeed—I never read anything so funny as the letters they wrote when Mr. Kennedy forgot to pay his rent. They wanted the money so badly, yet knowing how eccentric he was they were so afraid he would leave and they wouldn't be able to get another tenant! The letters were the most amusing mixture of threats and wheedling!

Some of these various facts I conveyed to Uncle Bob and Mrs. Alex who had put me through a complete cross-examination by letter concerning my employer, when they learned that I actually had a job. Mrs. Alex expected to be South all the spring,

so she had to be content with sending long-distance admonitions and cautions, but Uncle Bob wasn't. No, indeed, he came right on to New York and gave Mr. Kennedy, his surroundings, his connections, and his credentials a most thorough looking into by means of various private investigators. I didn't like it at all.

"Other girls who work haven't got guardians and relatives to do that sort of thing for them," I protested. "It doesn't seem to me that it's the real spirit of Father's will, Uncle Bob."

"I know, I know," said Uncle Bob, impatiently, "but you see, Leslie, this is a very unusual sort of position. If you had gone to any of my friends, or were in some big office of a well-known, reputable firm I shouldn't have been anxious about you. But when you work in such an isolated place in an almost deserted house, that's different."

As I didn't want to stir up Uncle Bob on the subject of my not having used the letters of introduction he sent me, I let the matter drop. Anyway, I was awfully glad to see him. We had the jolliest time in the evenings, went to the theatre every night and out to supper afterward at the biggest, brightest restaurants. But I didn't ask him to take me to

the Knickerbocker Grill, for I had too painful memories of the time that Jimmie Peters and I were there and Ranny Heeth made himself so objectionable. Uncle Bob enjoyed going about, I know, though he pretended all the time that he was dead for sleep and getting very dissipated. I introduced all the girls I knew to him, and though he liked Antoinette and Celia, it was Minnie who was his never-ending joy, on account of her slang. He thought it was the funniest thing he had ever heard in his life. He wouldn't have thought it was so funny if I had been the one using it—I'm sure of that.

After he had had Mr. Kennedy investigated in all the various ways he could think of, and had about decided that he was all right and I might stay with him, I asked Uncle Bob to come out and meet him, for I felt sure that if he saw him he'd be better satisfied than by any number of investigators' reports.

It happened to be one of Mr. Kennedy's better days, when he wasn't immersed in work and ready to eat any one alive who ventured to speak to him. He came out in his old linen duster, of course, very rumpled and untidy, but all the same he looked fine and manly and *all right*. Uncle Bob and he liked

each other at first sight, and talked away together briskly, quite ignoring me. But I was used to it.

Finally Uncle Bob left, telling Mr. Kennedy that he was now quite satisfied with my position, and that I might remain. I nearly shouted out loud at Mr. Kennedy's face when he said that. He didn't know what to make of a secretary who had such a beautiful old aristocrat of an uncle who censored her employers. After Uncle Bob had gone, Mr. Kennedy came into my office and paused by my desk, looking at me as if he had never really seen me before.

"It's the most extraordinary thing," he said, "but, you know, your uncle's call makes me realize that employers ought to have to give references as well as employed."

I knew that was an opening for me to satisfy his curiosity about me, but I wouldn't take it. "I don't believe any of your former secretaries would give you a very good reference as an employer, Mr. Kennedy," I said wickedly, "but perhaps George and Mrs. O'Malley might."

"Oh, well hit!" he said, laughing, "I believe you're right. I—I think your uncle—er—very interesting —and pleasant, Miss Brennan," he wound up, rather hesitatingly.

"Uncle Bob's all that," I said, "and a great deal more to me. He's my guardian, you know—not a real uncle."

This bit of information whetted Mr. Kennedy's curiosity still further. But he wouldn't ask questions, "Oh, your guardian!" he said, "well, he's one of those uncommonly fine old chaps that make you hope you'll be the same sort when you've reached his age."

"Yes, isn't he." I said pleasantly, and distinctly put a period after the three words. There was nothing left for Mr. Kennedy to do but go on into the laboratory to his work. When I recalled how I had burned with curiosity about him during my first two or three days I was quite pleased to see that he was in the same state, only much more mildly. I felt that Uncle Bob's call had been a great success from every standpoint.

After Uncle Bob had gone back home I settled down to the routine of my work. It was always interesting. There were so many unusual letters to answer, and Mr. Kennedy's banking to attend to, and sometimes he'd send me down to the library to copy out long extracts from all sorts of strange books and treatises. There were always supplies of various

sorts with jaw-breaking names to be ordered and checked, and the house accounts to be kept as well, for after Mrs. O'Malley and I became more friendly, she and I collaborated on those famously, though they were not originally included in my work.

Outside of my work things settled into a routine, too. No more interesting people (like Jimmie) came to Mrs. Harris's, and Minnie and I fell into a regular round of doing things. One night a week for theatre or concert, one night sewing and mending—sometimes two of them, one night for my Spanish lesson, one night for reading French with Antoinette, one night for reading with Minnie, and one night for foolishness, when we made fudge or wrote letters or shampooed each other, or ran out to see some of Celia's wild friends' wilder meetings—that was the way we arranged it. It seemed to me I was constantly scrambling to catch up with all the things I wanted to crowd into my life.

There was only one part of my work I didn't like and that was to see all the people who called on Mr. Kennedy and get rid of them without wasting too much time and energy. I found this hard and trying. He had a few, oh, a very few friends that he would see, and there were also a very few men

through whom he bought supplies and to whom he wished to talk personally, but only when he had sent for them. If he hadn't sent for them they might sit about all day—he wouldn't see them any more than if he'd been the Czar of Russia. The rest of the people who came I had to see and dispose of, and there were a good many of them, and most of them were tiresome and persistent.

Old George could have turned them away at the door, if he would, but they could always manage to get round him on one pretext or another, and that left me to deal with them. No matter how faithfully George promised me that he wouldn't let certain men in, it was always "But, Miss, dear, he says he has something most important to say to ye," and there the man would be sitting comfortably inside and waiting to make my life miserable.

I might have advised Mr. Kennedy of this trying state of affairs and he would have got some one to take George's place, I know, but George had been with Mr. Kennedy for ever so many years and was so devoted and so generally good and kind that I wouldn't have had him go for the world. If Mr. Kennedy had got any one else to answer the door, I believe it would have broken George's heart, for

he dearly loved to think of himself as an absolutely indispensable factotum. Mrs. O'Malley was ever so much more efficient than George—she'd send the persistent ones to the right-about in half a moment. She'd just open the door a crack and say: "Mr. Kennedy's *out*," and slam the door to and shoot the bolt. They knew it wasn't so, but they had no chance either to argue or wheedle. Unfortunately Mrs. O'Malley was not often given the chance to tend the door.

Two of the men who came were usually together, and every moment they were in my office I felt as though nothing escaped their attention. I'm sure they could read print and writing upside down—and did it constantly. They were both foreign types, but they called themselves by the obviously assumed names of William Douglas and David Jenkinson. Those names alone used to put me out of patience with them. They represented themselves as being willing and anxious to dispose of the formula of Mr. Kennedy's new explosive for an enormous sum of money. Would I only get them a chance to talk with Mr. Kennedy. They brought me flowers and candy several times, evidently thinking that they'd get on the right side of me that way,

but I refused to accept either with a vigour that surprised and temporarily disconcerted them. But they always came back. Oh, they made me so raging mad, and so uneasy and worried, too.

I knew, from the way they kept gazing about, that they were just hunting for a chance to go through Mr. Kennedy's notes and files. At last I caught Douglas, a hawk-nosed, black-haired chap he was, trying one of the file cases one day behind my back. I saw him in the mirror and I called George. For once, even George was impressed with the necessity of keeping some one out, and after that I saw Douglas no more. That he had tried to steal something from George's idol "the masther," and been caught red-handed settled him with George, when all I had said before had had no effect at all.

Jenkinson thereafter came alone, and though I told him over and over again that Mr. Kennedy had said he was not ready to negotiate, he would always have ready a long-winded talk of what he could do for him and how much it was to his advantage to deal with him, and so on, and so on. I sincerely hoped that some day Jenkinson would try to open a file case and let me catch him at it,

so that I could convince George that he was also an undesirable.

There was another man, more imaginatively named than Douglas and Jenkinson—his name was Franklin Fischer—who helped to make life a misery for me, too. He also was a would-be agent; he also would be only too glad to procure enormous sums of money for Mr. Kennedy's new explosive; and he, too, since Mr. Kennedy wouldn't talk to him, tried to ingratiate himself with me and get what information out of me he could. There were other persistent and tiresome bores, but Fischer, like Abou ben Adhem, led all the rest!

He was a tall man with rather heavy features and a peculiarly hard, inexpressive pair of eyes, dull and round like marbles. He had a sinister scar over his left eye that looked as if it might have been made from a sabre cut. His manner, I will say, was pleasant and quiet enough, and he didn't make the mistake of offering me either floral or confectionery tributes. But I disliked him and distrusted him, and begged George to keep him out. And George did—*not!*

One night as I was starting home, I was surprised to meet a man on the street just outside of

the gate, who spoke to me by name and lifted his hat. I almost never met any one I knew casually like this in New York, so I looked at him closely and half stopped, drawing away from him. The man stopped, too.

"Did I frighten you, Miss Brennan?" he asked politely. "I'm so sorry."

"Oh, it's Mr. Fischer," I said, for by this time I had recognized him. "You didn't exactly frighten me—I was just surprised for a moment. Good evening."

"Are you going to the Subway?" he asked. "May I go with you?"

"Thank you," I answered firmly, "I really prefer to go alone."

"Oh, come, Miss Brennan," he said, "I'm really not such a bad sort as all that. You're surely not afraid of me. I want very much to talk to you on a matter that might be worth a great deal to you, as well as to me."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The people that I represent," he said, very smoothly, coming close to me, "feel that if you would be willing to consider certain business relations with them, they might make it well worth your while to

enter their service, though remaining ostensibly in your present position."

He waited to see how I took that. "Is that so?" I asked, "and what people do you represent, Mr. Fischer?"

"I'm not at liberty to say that," he went on, "until we understand each other better on this matter."

"Well, what do these people whose names you refuse to tell want me to do?" I asked.

"I really would rather not discuss the matter here," he said. "Why don't you come and dine with me, and let me tell you about it in some privacy. The street corner is hardly the place to talk confidential business."

"I don't care to dine with you," I said bluntly, "and this street corner looks fairly well-deserted and private to me. If you have nothing more to say, I'll go on."

He put out an importunate hand. "Wait a moment," he said, "don't be hasty. I'll put it in just a word. The people I represent would pay you well to turn over copies of your notes to me, also duplicates of all the orders your employer sends out."

"You want Mr. Kennedy's correspondence complete, I take it?" I said. "Is that it?"

"Yes," he said eagerly, coming closer to me, "that's just it. Now be a sensible girl and think it over."

"I don't need to think it over," I said. "Look down the street, Mr. Fischer. Do you see that policeman standing there? Yes? Now if you say one more word to me or come near Mr. Kennedy's house again, I'll appeal to that policeman. There may not be any law to prevent you from trying to bribe other people's stenographers, but you'll get some undesirable publicity out of it, and you won't be so useful to the people who employ you after *that*."

I don't know now how I dared to speak so, or what made me think of undesirable publicity, for I was *so* frightened that I fairly shook. And just as angry as I was frightened. Fischer started to say something, but I drew away a step or two toward the policeman, who had just turned halfway round toward us.

So then Mr. Fischer gave an angry little jerk and walked off hastily down the street. I stood still and watched him until he went into the Subway kiosk and then I turned and ran as hard as I could back to the house. I rang the bell, ran past George and right on through the hall, the parlour, my

office, and into the laboratory, not stopping to knock this time.

Thank heaven, Mr. Kennedy was still there! Of course I startled him, jumping in like that, but as soon as I began to talk he listened.

"It was that man Fischer," I gasped, breathless with flight and fright and anger. "He stopped me on the street outside and said that the people he represents—he wouldn't say who they are—would pay me well if I'd transcribe all the notes of your letters for them, and give them your orders for supplies—and I had to call a policeman—no, I mean I had to threaten to call a policeman—and he's gone down the Subway——"

Mr. Kennedy interrupted me. He was as angry as I was. His eyes gleamed with it and his red hair fairly bristled. "The swine!" he exclaimed. "Frightening a woman . . . the dirty swine . . . I'll get *him!*" Then more gently he went on, "I'm so sorry you had such a fright and such an experience, Miss Brennan. Come, don't think any more about it. Just wait a few minutes and try to calm yourself. I'm going to take you home."

"You don't understand," I cried. "I'm not worried about myself. I don't want you to go home

with me—I'm afraid, but I'm not afraid to do that. You mustn't leave here, Mr. Kennedy. You ought to stay right here and telephone for the police, or get some sort of protection! They might break in and steal your files. They might—oh, there's no telling what they might do. I'm afraid for your safety. That man Fischer is—oh, he's a dreadful sort of man."

Mr. Kennedy stared at me reflectively for a minute. "Now, look here," he said, "you've been fine and loyal and I'm going to tell you something that will ease your mind, but which I don't usually tell to my secretaries. This house is carefully guarded. It has a perfect network of burglar alarms to prevent the thing you're afraid of. I take no chances, there are three separate and distinct systems, so that if one is put out of commission, the others will work. You think I'm careless about my notes and papers—why, my dear child, there isn't a thing in my files that would be of any real use to any one in the world. The things that are really valuable are put where nobody but me can get at 'em. The very reason that I live here in this isolated way, with nobody but old George and Mrs. O'Malley, is to guard against people like Fischer getting hold of

somebody who's near to me. I had one of the finest little formulas for a powder—an improved lyddite—stolen from me two or three years ago and the men who got it made a fortune out of it. I don't need the money, but it certainly hurt my pride to be done like that. Now, come along, don't worry about me any more. Everything's quite safe. I'm going to put on my hat and coat and take you home, no matter what you say."

He was as good as his word, and I went meekly along with him, rejoicing in a new sense of security for him. He wouldn't go in the Subway—oh, no, indeed—but ordered a taxi instead and we rode away in grand style.

"Do you mind," I said, when we had got fairly into the network of brightly lighted city streets, "if I ask you if there isn't some way we could keep out people like Fischer?"

"Why, of course," he answered, turning toward me, "you don't have to bother with all those agents. Most of them are fakes, anyway. Tell George not to let them in."

There I was faced with the dilemma I'd feared. I didn't want to tell on George. "Well," I said hesitatingly, "people seem to have a way of getting

round George, and you mustn't tell him not to open the door, for he loves it so and it makes him feel so important."

"I mustn't, eh?" said Mr. Kennedy, and he actually laughed—the first time I'd ever seen him do *that*. "No, I suppose I mustn't. But I tell you what I'll do. I'll put up a little partition in the hall and make a sort of vestibule of the end near the door, and I'll tell George myself that nobody is to come beyond that vestibule until you've looked him over and heard his business. I didn't realize how much this bunch of thieves and robbers was invading your office."

"But to build a vestibule," I demurred; "isn't that a lot of trouble, and expensive, too?"

"I dare say it is," said Mr. Kennedy, "but I can't think of anything better. I've got to consider George's feelings, you tell me, and I've certainly got to prevent you from being harassed by people like Fischer."

That was just like him—not a bit polite, so I felt more at ease. But even so, he didn't seem much like my abrupt, growling, linen-dustered employer of every day. He looked quite nice in his slouch hat and big overcoat—younger, too. I didn't say

anything to his last remark. Let him build his vestibule if he wanted to, I thought.

"How are you feeling by this time?" he asked suddenly when we had gone a few blocks farther. "Nerves all right now?"

"I wasn't really nervous," I said indignantly. "I'm not the nervous kind."

"By Jupiter!" said Mr. Kennedy, "that's right—you're not. Do you remember how you fairly spit at me the day you came about the position? I was terrified for my life. I had to engage you in self-defence."

Miracles and miracles—Mr. Kennedy actually making a joke!

"I'm sorry I was rude," I began meekly, "I suppose it *wasn't* just the right thing for a poor, downtrodden working girl to say when she's applying for a job. But you must remember that you didn't speak like the conventional employer, either."

"I suppose not," he said, "but I was desperate. I couldn't get a girl who could write letters without having every word spelled out, and who squealed and jumped about every time there was a noise in the laboratory."

"Well," I said, "I hope there won't be any what

you call 'noises' in the laboratory, for I'm afraid I should squeal like the rest. So long as everything is quiet my reputation's safe. But I don't promise to be quiet and calm if we're all 'blown to flinders' as George says."

It wasn't an interesting or important conversation at all that we had on that long ride downtown, but the thing about it that made it count in my mind was that Mr. Kennedy was so—different. Kinder, more natural, with only one or two little lapses into his natural state of rudeness, and if it had been any one else I should have said that he was interested, and almost attentive to me in a queer, diffident way. When he told me good-night at Mrs. Harris's door he gripped my hand hard for a moment. "You're a very plucky little girl," he said, "I won't forget it."

The way he said it made me feel tongue-tied and shy, yet somehow glowing. The last thing I thought about that night when I went to sleep was his voice saying, "I won't forget it." He had a nice voice—when he wasn't cross and excited! I knew he must have appreciated my telling him about Fischer, to bring me all the way home in a taxi, and the taxi had ticked off a bill of four dollars and twenty cents and he'd hardly noticed it. And he a Scotchman!

## CHAPTER IX

THE building of the vestibule designed to keep out unwanted callers wasn't really necessary after all, for Mr. Kennedy gave George a heart-to-heart talk that made him a very dragon.

"I described to him," Mr. Kennedy told me, "how you had been approached by this man Fischer and at the peril of your life you had dashed back here to warn me. I suggested that Fischer was a member of the Black Hand, or some other secret murder organization, and that your life, as well as mine, was probably in danger, and now George has put a big black-thorn shillalah behind the front door and says that hereafter he's going to hit a man first and talk to him after. I hope he won't be arrested in his zeal to guard us."

I hoped not, too, but I was glad that George was ready to be more careful, though I doubted that it would last. Still, he did much better. We didn't see Fischer again at the office, but several times I had an uncomfortable feeling that I was followed as I

went to and from work, and I was a good bit more careful about destroying notes and papers. I didn't tear them up, but I put them with my own hands into Mrs. O'Malley's kitchen stove and watched them burn. After what Mr. Kennedy had said, I didn't suppose there was anything in them that Fischer and his kind would have found of value, but I wasn't going to take any chances. I didn't know what they wanted, and I didn't know how far they would go to get what they wanted, and I certainly didn't want anything to fall into their hands through any carelessness of mine.

Since the Fischer incident there had been a change in Mr. Kennedy's attitude toward me. He was more friendly, and now and then he would talk with me a little about the things he was working at. The new explosive was to be called "sarnite," he said, and it would be the safest to handle and the deadliest in effect of anything that had ever been made. He hoped, too, to make it almost deterioration-proof, so no matter how long it had been stored it would always shoot just as well as when it was brand new. He said that was the most difficult thing of all to do.

The best of it was that the formula for it was to

go to our own government—and Mr. Kennedy would not get a cent for it. He said, quite awkwardly, and as if he had been caught in something not at all to his credit, that, hang it, the States had done a lot for him—taught him everything he knew—helped him when he needed help (that referred to a progressive old general in the army who had encouraged him with his first experiments and given him some valuable introductions)—and, by Jove, he was not going to be an ungrateful duffer. Besides, he said, as if I might accuse him of good intentions, he didn't need the money.

Those little disjointed sentences were all he would say about it, and he was being remarkably confidential when he told me as much as that. Oh, he was a queer man. He wasn't a scrap like any of the boys I had known at home. I don't believe he ever danced a step in his life, and he hated going out to parties, and what he called "fuss." He belonged to one club, and used to go there sometimes to dinner with other men, and then maybe to the theatre, but that was about as much social life as he could be dragged into. He liked hunting, and he liked riding, but I don't think he ever paid a compliment to a girl in his life, and he acted as if

he was almost afraid of them. Sometimes I used to wonder if some girl hadn't treated him badly some time when he was younger—it seemed as if there must be some reason like a sentimental past to explain it.

After the Fischer excitement had finally been forgotten, and everything had simmered down into the quietude of everyday work, with only George's garrulousness and Mrs. O'Malley's rheumatism to contend with, there came one day, while I was sitting at my desk, writing away on my machine, the most horrible noise and shock, like a clap of thunder.

For a dreadful, deafening moment everything in the room seemed to be toppling down. The window panes cracked in a thousand pieces and smashed down on the floor. The mirror fell off the wall, and so did a great framed map, and in their fall both were broken and shattered, adding to the confusion.

As for me, I was so stunned and frightened that I did not know for almost five minutes, I suppose, what had happened. I sat perfectly still clutching my chair, and wondering if it was an earthquake. Mrs. O'Malley, in the kitchen, was screaming like

a banshee, and that was what finally brought me to myself. I hurried out to her, and found her standing in the middle of the floor, with the rolling pin in her hand, and her pots and pans lying in great weltering waves all about her.

"What is ut?" she screamed at me, crossing herself with the hand that didn't hold the rolling pin. "What is ut, Miss, dear?"

I now knew what it was, oh, I knew. It was that long-threatened explosion in the laboratory, and I, like a fool, had run out to the kitchen instead of going to find Mr. Kennedy—if there was anything left of him. I turned and ran back, calling to Mrs. O'Malley to find George, for it went through my head like a flash that we would need all the help we could get.

It took only a second for me to get back from the kitchen into my office, but smoke was pouring into it from under the door of the laboratory, acrid, black, choking smoke. Now, too, I could hear old George running downstairs and calling out to us excitedly.

Oh, but I dreaded to open that door. What would there be behind it? Flames, surely, and possibly something much worse—Mr. Kennedy, dead, maimed

—I put my hand on the knob and flung it open before I had time to think further.

The laboratory was full of smoke, but the windows had been blown out by the force of the explosion, like the windows in my office, so the air was not unbreathable. Through the smoke I could see flames leaping up like mad along the side of one of the tables, crackling and hissing as if they fed on something they loved. I did not see Mr. Kennedy at all.

There was a sink set in the nearest table, and to this I ran, and turned on the water, but it did not flow fast enough, and, besides, there was nothing to catch it in. I ran back desperately, and my eyes fell on the great watercooler that was George's special pride. He had put a fresh bottle of water in it that very morning, and it had not been broken by the explosion.

And now George came dashing in, calling frantically, "Masther Ewan, Masther Ewan—answer now for the love av Mary——"

"Come and help me with the bottle," I screamed to him, but he ran on into the laboratory, paying no attention. Somehow, I don't know how, I lifted that great bottle and staggered into the laboratory

with it, carried it around the long tables, and dropped it on the highest flame. It fell with a dreadful smash, broke into as many pieces as the window, and the water flowed out on the fire.

It was only a momentary check, but it gave me time to run back to the kitchen and snatch Mrs. O'Malley's biggest saucepan, and tear back to use it as a dipper with the water from the sink. She was still standing in the middle of the floor wringing her hands—she had dropped the rolling pin by this time, and she had so far collected her wits that when I called to her to bring water, she managed to get a bucketful from the kitchen tap. I seized it and sent her back for more.

I flung the water on as fast as I could—oh, how I wished for a fireman's hose—and in my excitement of trying to get the fire out I did not think of Mr. Kennedy or George, either. Then I heard George saying wildly: "Oh, it's dead he is, for shure!" and I turned to see that one of the great shelved cases full of supplies had fallen over and that Mr. Kennedy was caught under it. He must have turned to run out of the laboratory, and this great thing had caught him. I went sick and faint, and the whole place spun around me, but I knew I

must not do anything so weak and silly as go to pieces now.

"You keep on throwing water on the fire," I said firmly to Mrs. O'Malley. "See, we're getting the best of it—look—throw over there." I put the saucepan in her hand and she dazedly accepted it and started to do as I ordered.

Then I turned to George and Mr. Kennedy. "We've got to get this mass of stuff off him, Miss," said George.

"Oh, George—is he dead?" I burst out.

"It's no time to be askin' that," said George. "See, Miss—catch hold at that side, and as you lift, I'll lift, too, and when I've got a good grip on it, slip that heavy stool under to hold it up. Oh, the poor lad, the poor lad!"

I caught hold of the cupboard as George showed me, and lifted with all my might. It wasn't so heavy as I had expected, and we had it propped up with the stool in a minute or two. Then George began to pull out from under it, very gently, the motionless body of Mr. Kennedy.

There was blood all over his face, and as I saw that I felt the awful faint feeling come over me again. But I fought it back. Slowly, painfully, we dragged

him clear of the cupboard and the mass of débris. He was unconscious, of course—I thought surely he was dead.

"Now," said George, "do you take his feet, Miss, and I'll take his head and we'll carry him into your office. Ah, the pity that he would ever be at this dirthy business. I knew it'd come to no good luck f'r him. Gently—that's the way."

It wasn't a very easy thing to do, for Mr. Kennedy was a big man, and an inert body is doubly heavy to handle. But George and I got him through the door at last, and laid him on the floor of my office, hastily pushing back some of the broken glass and the mess of splintered frames to make a clear space for him. I ran into the parlour and robbed the old sofa of its one old pillow that I had often secretly laughed at. It came in handy enough now. I brought it in and slipped it under his head. George, meanwhile, was listening to his heart.

"It's alive he is," he announced, "glory be to God!"

"We'd better get a doctor," I said. "He may have had internal hurts with that heavy thing falling on him. I'll run across the street and get one."

"I'll go, Miss, dear," said George, "I know all of

the doctors' offices hereabouts—I've found them out, expectin' somethin' like this."

That was anticipation, indeed—looking up the nearest doctors in case of any accident, but I had no time to be amused by George's foresight, even if I had been inclined to be, for Mrs. O'Malley was calling. I left Mr. Kennedy and hurried back to the laboratory. I thought the fire was getting away from her. But I was wrong.

"It's out entirely," said the little old woman, wearily, "and me arrm is fair broke wid the liftin' an' throwin'."

And it was out—though it was still smoking. But not much. The laboratory was a sight, with the broken windows, the smashed apparatus, and glass wreckage all over everything, and the charred and burnt table and floor. The dismal wetness of its drenching made it worse. I drew Mrs. O'Malley out, and closed the door behind us. And then I wished I'd taken her out another way, for when she caught sight of Mr. Kennedy, lying still and bloody on the floor, she let out a yell that pierced my ears.

"Oh, the foine young man!" she mourned. "Sorra the day! Sorra the day!"

"Let's get some water and wash the blood off his

face," I said, "so we can see how badly he's cut, Mrs. O'Malley. Maybe we can do something for him."

I had a dreadful time getting her to leave him and help me, but finally I got some warm water and the kitchen towel, knelt beside him, and succeeded in washing off most of the blood from his face. It came from a long cut down his cheek, and it didn't seem to be a deep one, for it had almost stopped bleeding. As I was bathing his face, and touching him as gently as I could, for fear that he was bruised, he began to make little noises in his throat, and his eyelids fluttered. He was coming to. Oh, if I only had my bottle of salts, I thought, and I appealed to Mrs. O'Malley, but she could suggest nothing better than a burnt feather held under the nose—fine for bringing people round, she said! Frightened and excited and wild as I felt, I almost laughed at the burnt feather, but I had no time to object to it, for just at that moment George came charging in with a doctor in tow.

Oh, he was the nicest man, that doctor—one of those big, competent doctors who does everything at once and isn't in a bit of a flurry, and has a voice that fairly compels you to have confidence in him.

He brought Mr. Kennedy round in no time. And the first thing he said, as he got his eyes wide open was:

"Daisy!"

Think of Mr. Kennedy calling on a woman's name! I was so astounded. "Aha!" I said to myself, "now I've found out the name of the girl who turned him against all other girls! I wonder who she is!"

But, my heavens, the doctor looked around at me! "Are you Daisy?" he asked. "Please come here where he can see you if you are."

"But I'm not," I said, "I'm his secretary." I suppose he didn't know what or who I might be, I was so dishevelled and begrimed.

"Oh," said the doctor—then, turning to Mr. Kennedy, "Lie still," he said, soothingly, "don't try to raise yourself yet." And he commenced running his hands deftly over his arms and legs—feeling for broken bones, I suppose.

"What happened?" asked Mr. Kennedy weakly. "Oh, I remember—it was a spark—blew into some—some powder—I think."

"Don't think just yet," advised the doctor; "it looks to me as if it had been an earthquake. Lie

still, please." He put a restraining hand on Mr. Kennedy, and of course, Mr. Kennedy couldn't stand that.

"I'm all right," he said, crossly; "leave me alone, can't you! Here, let me get up."

"Lie still, Masther Ewan," implored George; and "For the love av hiven, hark to him," came from Mrs. O'Malley.

"Oh, well," said the doctor, "if you feel as strong as all that there's no reason why you shouldn't get up." He added in an aside to me, "It's the quickest way to find out where he's smashed."

The doctor and George lifted Mr. Kennedy into a sitting posture, and then helped him to his feet. Oh, he was a sight! His clothes were in rags, and soaked with blood; his face was ghastly and with that dripping red cut on his cheek! He was pitiful to look at. But he was game.

"There," said the doctor, "no bones broken—you're really almost as all right as you say you are. Now come along—we'll get you to bed for the rest of the day and I'll put some stitches into this cut, and by to-morrow you won't know there was ever anything the matter with you."

But Mr. Kennedy wasn't satisfied, he kept looking

toward the laboratory. "There was a fire," he said confusedly, "I saw the flames shoot up——"

"The fire's out," I said, "don't worry about that. Please go to bed, and just forget the laboratory for the rest of the day. Do as the doctor says, *please*, Mr. Kennedy."

At last he was persuaded and, with the doctor and George supporting him and Mrs. O'Malley bringing up the rear, he disappeared upstairs, and I was left alone in my ruined office. What I wanted to do was to go straight home, but of course I couldn't do that and leave Mrs. O'Malley and George there to get things cleaned up alone. Besides, I didn't know what the doctor was going to say about Mr. Kennedy.

But I couldn't sit down and be still—I was too excited and restless for that, so I went out in the kitchen and picked my way through the fallen pots and pans and got the broom, and a big market basket, and brought them both back with me. The larger pieces of glass and wood I picked up and put into the basket, and I was just sweeping the smaller bits together and wondering why I hadn't brought the dustpan in, too, when downstairs came the doctor and Mrs. O'Malley.

"Lave the dirt lay," said Mrs. O'Malley—it was evident that she had recovered her spirit. "I'll clane it up as soon as iver I've me kitchen to rights. 'Tis not fit that the likes of you should go swapin' and clanein' wid all the rest of it."

The doctor was putting on his gloves. "Are you in charge here?" he asked me.

"Mrs. O'Malley and George are in charge," I said. "I live downtown and come up here each day—I think I told you I'm Mr. Kennedy's secretary. But I'll be glad to stay and help if I'm needed."

"You're not needed," the doctor said. "Kennedy will be all right by to-morrow, I think. There are no bones broken and no internal injuries. He must have got an awful blow on the head that stunned him temporarily, and of course there's a bad cut on his cheek. But his hair is so thick it broke the force of the blow, and I've put some stitches in the cut. I'll look in again in the evening."

He was so calm about it that he calmed me, too, just by his way of speaking. "I'll stay and help Mrs. O'Malley clean up and get the place in order," I said, "and if Mr. Kennedy seems worse we'll send for you right away."

"Don't do too much," said the doctor, "and here

—bring me a glass, please." He took a little bottle out of his case and when Mrs. O'Malley had brought the glass he poured something in it. "Fill the glass with water and drink it," he said to me, "and then you'll all be all right. I've already dosed George and Mrs. O'Malley."

"That ye have," said Mrs. O'Malley, "an' I feel so frisky as a gurrl. An' yet it didn't taste to me like liquor."

The doctor laughed, but he watched me while I drank the mixture as he bade me. Almost instantly my trembling nervousness left me and my blood ran warm and I felt as Mrs. O'Malley had said, "frisky."

"Why, it's wonderful!" I cried. "What is it?"

He shook his head. "It's a very dangerous drug," he said, "only to be used in times of great necessity. I won't tell you what it is. You'd better go to bed early to-night and get a good night's rest. Otherwise, I think, you're all right."

"I hope Mr. Kennedy is!" I said fervently.

"Oh, he is!" replied the doctor and took himself and his little case forthwith out of the house.

Mrs. O'Malley and I, fortified by our draught of the unknown stimulant, set promptly to work to get things in order, and very soon we were aided by

George, who came downstairs and reported that the doctor had given Mr. Kennedy something to make him sleep.

It really did not take very long to get the office and the kitchen to rights, with the exception of the broken window panes, and for those I sent George in search of a glazier who would be willing to go to work at once and work all evening. The weather was too cold to leave the windows open like that. It took George a long time, but finally he dragged an unwilling workman and his assistant away from another job, and they were roused to enthusiasm when they saw the amount of glass to be reset.

"But now," I asked, when things were fairly to rights again, "what are we going to do about the laboratory?"

"The masther says we're to lave it alone," said George; "he said 'twould only be worse confusion if anny of us touched it."

That sounded so typical that I felt pretty sure Mr. Kennedy wasn't badly hurt.

"All right," I agreed; "but let's go in and take a look to see if there's any more danger of fire."

"That there is not," contended Mrs. O'Malley stoutly, "I did me worruk well."

And when we went to look, she was quite right—she had done her work well. There was not even any smoldering in the charred and ruined places where the fire had been. Looking at it now that it had gone out, we could see that it had never been a very big fire—indeed, I wondered that the flames had been so fierce and persistent.

"It was some av thim chemicals of his made it so bad," said old George, nodding his head wisely, "an' ye must excuse me, Miss, dear, that I didn't come to y'er help when ye were throwin' on the water, but me first thought was for the masther, an' when I seen him lyin' there under that heavy cupboard I just had to get him out first, fire or no fire."

I didn't say it, but I wished I'd thought of him first. And all the way home that night I kept asking myself, "Who *is* Daisy?"

## CHAPTER X

THE first thing Minnie said when she saw me come in that evening was, "What *has* happened?"

"Why?" I asked. "Do I look as though anything had happened?"

"Do you look as though anything had happened!" said Minnie, still staring at me. "You look as though the end of the world had come or some other little thing like that. And your suit"—she pounced on that—"why, it's all burned! Has there been a fire? What have you been doing?" She seized hold of me and gave me a little shake that was not impatience but solicitude.

"It wasn't anything—much," I said. "Some powder or stuff blew up in the laboratory and there was a little fire, and I helped put it out."

"I knew it! I knew it!" said Minnie, in a perfect frenzy. "I knew that was no place for you to work! That man Kennedy ought to be investigated by the police, keeping explosives about in this way and

trying to murder everybody in the house. I'm going to write to your Uncle Bob and ask him to come right on here! It's an outrage! It's an——"

I turned round and I just blazed on her. "Minnie," I said, "if you say another word like that it will break up our friendship forever. You've been dear and good and kind to me, but you have no right to interfere in my affairs any more than I would have to interfere in yours. Now please let's stop this melodramatic stuff. I wasn't in the least danger and it was only a little bit of a fire that burned the side of a table and a little place on the floor. I can't imagine why you should get so excited and make all these silly threats against Mr. Kennedy."

There was a very tense silence in my little room for a minute or two after I said that, and then Minnie began, in a much lower key: "I suppose I did hit the high spots, Leslie—but it made me so angry to think of you being in danger—and you know—I'm so fond of you——"

She rather choked up with that and then I felt that I had spoken foolishly, too. I went over and put my arm around her. "It's all right," I said. "Aren't we two geese, though? Now, I'll tell you

all about it and you'll see that there really wasn't anything to get excited about."

But I didn't tell her all about it. I told her only a very pale version, for I knew if she heard that the windows were blown out and Mr. Kennedy was cut and stunned and I had been fighting a fire in the midst of a lot of explosives, she would have been just as wild as she was at first, and would probably write to Uncle Bob after all. I made the whole thing appear a very brief and unexciting occurrence, and I never said a word about having to get a doctor for Mr. Kennedy.

"The worst of it is," I wound up my story gaily, "that I've burnt two or three holes in this skirt, in places that show, too, and I'll simply have to get a new one. I'll get Antoinette to help me darn this one, but I don't believe it'll last much longer."

That distracted Minnie's mind sufficiently and she began to tell me about a lovely suit she had seen in an uptown store for only thirty dollars, and we talked clothes like mad for the rest of the evening.

None of the other boarders noticed anything extraordinary about me, so I didn't have to tell the story of my day again when dinner was over. I said I was tired and went to bed early, as the

doctor had ordered, and oh, when my head touched that pillow and I could feel myself slowly relaxing, I knew then what a strain the day's experience had been.

In the morning I was as good as new, though my burned skirt wasn't. It looked dreadful in daylight. I simply raced through breakfast and to the Subway, for I couldn't help feeling anxious about Mr. Kennedy, and since I hadn't told any one about his condition, I was doubly anxious. Some one has said that an anxiety shared is cut in half, and I know it's so.

George met me at the door with a grin, and before I had time to ask he said: "The masther's up and feelin' foine. He's as sound as a dollar excipt f'r the ugly cut on his face yet."

Maybe I wasn't glad to hear it! And when I saw Mr. Kennedy in the laboratory, getting things to rights and ordering about a carpenter and the glazier of the day before, I could just about have shouted for joy.

"Oh, but I *am* glad you're all right!" I said—but I could see by his face that I'd said the wrong thing. He didn't want any one to think he'd been much hurt, I suppose.

"Of course I'm all right," he said, brusquely. "Fit as a fiddle. There's a lump on top of my head and I've got this beastly cut—but otherwise I feel fine."

"It takes a good bit to kill a Scotchman," I told him. I just couldn't help it—I felt as though he deserved a little slap for answering me that way.

"What?" he said—but he heard me—"It takes a good bit to kill an Irishman, too, I'm told." And he smiled that bad little boy smile of his. Then he dropped his disagreeable manner and came over to me.

"Seriously, Miss Brennan," he said, "I have a great deal to thank you for, and I hardly know how to do it. Mrs. O'Malley told me how you rose to the occasion and got the fire out and then helped lift that brute of a cupboard off me. Most women would have fainted or run away screaming. I'm specially glad you didn't call in the fire department or the police—it might have ended in my being turned out of here, I know, and I certainly don't want that, not yet, anyway."

"I didn't do very much," I said, "and I'm afraid I left you to perish ignobly under the cupboard. My only thought was to get the fire out, and it was

George who did the real rescue work. And Mrs. O'Malley was simply splendid, too. You should have seen her throwing water on the flames."

"I ought to be in the foire departmint," said Mrs. O'Malley, who had come in and was listening.

"We're all heroes, it seems," said Mr. Kennedy, "except me."

"Oh, but we had to have a victim to rescue," I said; "it really wouldn't have been half so exciting if it hadn't been for you."

"So that's the way you look at it," said Mr. Kennedy. "Well, I'm satisfied that I got out of it with as little damage as I did. I deserve to be the victim, for I had left some highly explosive powder uncovered while I worked at the model of a little loading mechanism I was trying out. I picked up my hammer to flatten down one of the catches, and I hadn't given it more than one or two good taps when a spark flew out—and the next thing I knew I was in bed upstairs."

At this point I wondered if he remembered speaking of Daisy—but I didn't ask.

"You need never be afraid in the future," he went on, "for I'll never do such a criminally careless thing again. It's the first big burst-up I've ever had, and

I've prided myself that this place was fool-proof. I see it isn't now—but it'll be so from this time on."

He held out his hand to me. "For all you did, my thanks," he said. "This is the second time you've proved what a plucky girl you are."

And we shook hands seriously.

Of course, I didn't get much work done that day, with the workmen and George and Mr. Kennedy all running through my office, but it was a nice kind of a day, even so, now that I knew Mr. Kennedy wasn't hurt and that there was no great damage done anywhere.

It took the better part of a week to get all the repairs made and the new supplies ordered and everything in running order again—and then we settled down to our routine, quite as if there wasn't such a thing as an explosion known to any of us.

I say we settled down to routine, but as for me, I had something new and very absorbing to think about—*clothes*. The darns that Antoinette and I managed to put in my burned skirt weren't a very great success, and it was high time for me to buy a new suit, for everything I had was getting shabby.

How I do love shopping! I suppose Uncle Bob

would have said that I'd always loved spending money, but now, you see, it was with a difference! Minnie and I made a pious pilgrimage to the savings bank where I kept the account she had made me start and we drew out fifty dollars—five nice yellow bills! I won't tell how much—or rather how little—was left. It was perfectly absurd, how happy I felt at having saved enough money of my own earning to buy myself some clothes. *My very own money!* Think of it. Earned by my own work! There's nothing quite like the thrill of it!

Of course since I was working so far uptown I didn't have much chance to shop, so Minnie went around for me in her luncheon hour, and there were two afternoons when I got away early, and on those I went to the places that Minnie had considered promising. It was very hard for me to make my taste and my money agree—every suit I really wanted was ninety or a hundred dollars, and some were more, but of course there was no use thinking of them. Finally I decided on a darling plain little suit of midnight-blue gabardine, good quality and very smartly cut, and it cost only thirty-five dollars! I hadn't thought it possible there could be anything so good at that price, though Minnie said that she'd had

plenty of suits for fifteen and twenty dollars. Why, Mrs. Alex used to pay her tailor a hundred and twenty-five for the simplest thing.

After the suit, of course, I must have a new hat; and I found a dark blue straw with loops of blue velvet and a big pale pink rose for trimming—that was seven dollars. It was very becoming. I almost purred when I put it on. Next I found, after long hunting, and looking at the most discouraging lot of stuff, a marked-down blouse of dark blue chiffon cloth and satin for only five dollars. So I had three dollars left and bought wash leather gloves and a pair of dark blue silk stockings, which Minnie said was an extravagance. Of course, I'd have to have other things, but I could buy them from week to week out of my salary, but my precious fifty had dressed me out from top to toe—and maybe I wasn't proud. I just pranced! Of course I'd had to buy things for myself right along, but this was the first time that I'd spent a whole lot of money at once, and I felt that in a way it was an epoch—a milestone in my career as a business woman, and a proof that I was really self-supporting and doing what Father wanted me to do.

And oh, the letters I wrote to Uncle Bob and Mrs.

Alex! I put sketches of the suit and blouse and hat all down the margin of my letter to Mrs. Alex, but I was afraid Uncle Bob would think I was crazy if I drew them on his. Mrs. Alex wrote back that she'd never been so proud of me in her life and she sent me a beautiful dark blue leather handbag, with a golden moiré lining and the dearest gold fittings!

"Much too elegant for Leslie, the poor working girl," I said to Minnie, "but it matches my suit so beautifully—and it's just what I need!"

The day after all my clothes and things came home I put them all on and went to work so gaily! The first thing was to run out to the kitchen and show my new outfit to Mrs. O'Malley, and after she had admired and exclaimed sufficiently, I decided that I'd have to sober down and get to work. I went into my office and took a last look at myself in the new mirror before I took off my hat, when suddenly Mr. Kennedy came in. I was just going to say to him would he please look at my grandeur—or rather I was wondering if I dared to say it—when he burst out excitedly:

"The sarnite formula's done, Miss Brennan! I've got it at last!"

"Oh that's *wonderful!*" I cried, forgetting for a

moment all about my new clothes at the news. "I'm so glad—I really am!"

"By Jove, I'd like to celebrate somehow!" he went on. "It's the end of five years of the hardest kind of work. I thought I'd never get it. I say, I do feel happy, you know!"

"I'm very much pleased with myself, too, to-day," I said, "though it seems childish to say anything about it after news like yours."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Mr. Kennedy.

I turned slowly around. "Do you see my suit—and hat?" I said. "I've an entire new outfit and I bought it with the money I earned and saved a little bit at a time. It makes me feel quite differently about these clothes to have bought them myself—I'm pleased with them out of all proportion with their importance, I know that—but still, I'm pleased."

Mr. Kennedy listened and looked at me with unusual attention.

"It's very smart," he said at last, and then, as if a brilliant idea had struck him, "why, of course—the very thing. We're both keen to celebrate something—we'll celebrate together. I'll hire a motor and we'll go out in the country somewhere, and find a jolly little inn and have things to eat."

I hesitated a moment, and thought of a whole lot of things—Miss Trippe's warning against employers, Minnie's often-repeated remarks that it was better to keep your work and your play absolutely separate—and yet—oh, how much I wanted to go.

Mr. Kennedy didn't apparently notice my hesitation. He was looking out of the window. "It's warm and sunny to-day," he said, "and I haven't been in the country for an age and a half. Please telephone for a car, Miss Brennan, and let me know when it comes." With that he vanished into the laboratory.

So it didn't seem as if I was to have anything to say in the matter. Instead of being invited to go, I was directed to assist in Mr. Kennedy's celebration, and even told to order the car. It was funny, and it wasn't very pleasant; but it convinced me of one thing, and that was that even Minnie and Miss Trippe in their strictest moments would not have objected to my going with Mr. Kennedy. Any man who could be as impersonal as all that was superlatively "safe."

Accordingly, I ordered a car; and having had no limit set on the price, I asked for the newest and most luxurious touring car from the best agency in

the city, and I suggested that a chauffeur in uniform was a necessity. When it appeared—with the proudest chauffeur—I went to the door of the laboratory and knocked, and announced it just as any well-trained secretary might. If I was going on this jaunt as a secretary, I determined to go only as that.

When we were finally seated in the car and on our way, I was amused to see that Mr. Kennedy had been seized with a fit of embarrassment. I think he felt that he had done a most absurd thing and repented it heartily; indeed was fairly cursing the impulse that had prompted him to ask me to go with him. And I just let him suffer—it is not the part of a secretary to worry about her employer's embarrassments!

"Do you know a good road to go?" he asked me snappishly.

"No, Mr. Kennedy," I replied primly, "I know nothing about the roads around New York."

I'm sure he swore under his breath. And then he looked around at me—and I couldn't help laughing. Then he laughed, too, rather sheepishly—with his bad little boy look of having been in mischief and being ashamed of himself. He really was a dear when he looked like that and I was sorry I'd

felt so annoyed with him. After all, he didn't know anything about how to be polite and nice with women, so he wasn't to blame for the way he behaved. I couldn't help wondering, though, why "Daisy" hadn't trained him a little better—but then, of course, he may not have acted this way with Daisy. No man living, I suppose, is as polite to his secretary as he is to his women friends.

But I wasn't going to ride along in that beautiful car and philosophize about how men acted to their secretaries. I was concerned with how Mr. Kennedy was acting to *his* secretary, and suddenly it came to me that I'd treat him just as I'd treated the men I knew at home, and Jimmie Peters, and make him see, for once, that I wasn't a mere part of a typewriting machine.

"I've often heard," I began quite amiably, "that Westchester is beautiful. Why don't we go out that way and take a look for ourselves? It's going to be a perfectly delicious day, I can foresee that. How do you like the car and the chauffeur? I told them we must have one in uniform."

"He seems all right," said Mr. Kennedy, a little bewildered by this sudden stream of small talk, but relieved, too, at my change in manner.

"Do you suppose," I asked, going on with my chatter determinedly, "that he knows any place where there are wildflowers? It's just the sort of day for picking violets, if there are any in bloom to pick. Only, of course, I don't want to go into briers and thickets and things with this grand new suit of mine."

Mr. Kennedy relaxed a little more. "Perhaps," he said, "I might pick the violets; provided, as you suggest, there are any to pick. Though I doubt that I could qualify as an expert flower-picker."

"You'll have to do, I suppose," I said gaily, "I can call directions to you from the car, such as 'longer stems, please,' and 'a few more leaves with that bunch,' and helpful hints like that."

Mr. Kennedy turned toward me suddenly. "You know," he began, "you're the most extraordinary girl. You were so brave and nervy, as you Americans say, about that rascal Fischer; and when I let that powder blow up; and you were so confoundedly spunky and sharp-tongued when I engaged you; and since then you've been such a very businesslike, efficient young person, and now——"

"I strive to please," I murmured.

"And now," he went on, "you suddenly turn

society young lady and give me drawing-room chatter. I don't understand you at all."

"But I doubt very much, Mr. Kennedy," I suggested, gravely enough—though I felt very chuckly, "that you have understood many girls."

"There's something in that," he replied. "You see, I don't like girls."

"Do you know, I suspected it!" I said.

"You're chaffing me," he said, with a good-natured grin. "Well, all the same, I *don't* like girls—never have. When I was a kid I used to hide when my sister's friends came in to play with us, and when I got older and the Mater wanted me to go to dances and parties and things, I couldn't stick it. Give me my own line, I said, and keep the sex away!"

I was dying to ask him where Daisy came in, but I thought better of it. "I wonder you didn't have a man secretary, then," I suggested, "since you dislike women so much."

"I did try two or three young chaps," he said; "but as a rule the man stenographer with brains doesn't stick at stenography long, and I didn't want the sort who do stick at it. Besides, where there's any secrecy to be observed a woman's safer than a man. More loyal, you know."

"Then in spite of our detestable faults you allow us loyalty," I said. "I hope you're right about it."

"I know I'm right," he said; "look at yourself, for example. The instant Fischer approached you with a bribe you threatened him with the police, and came rushing back to warn me."

"But that wasn't loyalty to you," I said, "that was loyalty to myself. Don't you see that?"

"Oh," said Mr. Kennedy, and I was glad to see that he looked rather crestfallen, "now that you put it that way—I see what you mean—though I must confess I hadn't thought of it."

"What you call loyalty, and name as an attribute of women," I said, wanting to tease him further, "is simply honesty. Women are more honest than men you should have said."

"Oh, hang it!" he exclaimed, "I can't argue. You've got me right in my own words, Miss Brennan."

And when he said Miss Brennan, I could see that he was looking at *me*, and thinking of me as a real person, not just as some one who handed him letters and took his orders.

After that, of course, it wasn't very difficult to

talk to him. Presently he got on the subject of his sarnite formula and then—good heavens!—he did talk. He had made up a lot of the stuff, it appeared, and the government tests had been made to everybody's satisfaction. It was going to be a very inexpensive stuff to make—would cost only about half as much as the powder in general use—and was twice as effective. The last step in the whole thing was for him to take the formula over to the Chief of Ordnance in the War Department.

We had gone far out into the lovely sun-washed spring country while he was telling me all this, and after a while we stopped at a quiet old inn for luncheon. While we ate he told me some more about the formula—of how he had never written it down, but carried it in his head, and how he didn't intend to trust it to paper until the very day he handed it to the Chief of Ordnance.

"If this were a kingdom instead of a republic you'd get a gorgeous decoration for this, or be knighted or something of the sort," I said.

"Oh, we've a title in the family now," he said, "but it's in the other branch. Personally, I don't care a fig for such rubbish."

Now wasn't that exciting—and I hadn't known a

thing about it! I longed to ask him what kind of a title it was, and what he meant by the "other branch"—but I hate to ask personal questions. They always seem impertinent.

After luncheon we motored some more, and at last in a hollow where they were sheltered from the cold, but could be warmed by the sun, we found a patch of violets. There were not very many of them, but they were bravely blue and sweet with a faint perfume. Mr. Kennedy and I both got out to pick them, and as we were going back to the car, and I was holding them in my hand, he exclaimed, as if he'd made a great discovery: "Why—they're the exact colour of your eyes."

(I wish Daisy had heard *that*.)

Then he lapsed into uneasy silence, evidently enraged with himself for saying anything so nice, and wondering whether I would think he meant it. As for me, I put on my most detached secretarial manner and appeared not to have heard him. It seemed best. And on the way home I made the politest and most distant conversation to which he responded in kind, quite unlike the easy confidences of earlier in the day.

When we parted, though, I said warmly: "It's

been just a beautiful day. It really couldn't have been nicer."

And he answered as if he was speaking without his own volition, but because he couldn't help it: "Why —do you know—this has been the finest day I ever spent."

Perhaps he meant because the sarnite formula was done.

But then again—perhaps he meant something else. It *sounded* as though he meant something else.

## CHAPTER XI

I DID not see very much of Mr. Kennedy for several weeks after our day in the country—he had some business trips to make, and was not at home very much.

When he was there, however, he was ever so much nicer than he had been before, almost polite at times. He seemed to be trying to preserve the *entente cordial* begun by our "celebration." Like the leopard, he couldn't change his spots—not all at once, anyway—but I could feel his friendship and his interest in many little ways.

As the day approached for him to take the sarnite formula to the Chief of Ordnance, his spirits went up—up—up! He was anticipating that moment of triumph as a school boy anticipates a particularly big stick of taffy. I could not help but wish that I might be there, too, unseen, and see what he would do and say, and watch him have his tribute, for by the letters that had come I knew they were prepared to make quite a fuss over him.

On the morning of the day he was to go I went up a little earlier than usual, for I had some things I wanted to have him sign before he left, and I was hardly in my office—indeed, I hadn't taken my hat off, when in he came, looking anxious and worried.

"This is the most rotten fix, Miss Brennan. Look here!"

He had a piece of yellow paper in his hand and he gave it to me to read. It was a telegram from his sister in Toronto and it said that his mother was very ill, and that he must come on at once.

"Oh, that's too dreadful!" I said. "You'll have to wire to Washington that you can't come."

"I can't do that!" he exclaimed. "There are important reasons why the formula must be in their hands to-day."

"But surely they'll understand," I said, "or couldn't you go to Washington and then take the night train for Toronto? Let me look at the railway guide."

"I wouldn't think of doing that," he said; "let the whole thing go hang! I wouldn't put off going to my mother when she's ill for forty Chiefs of Ordnance. My sister wouldn't have wired this way if it hadn't been urgent."

"Then I had an inspiration. "You go right along to your mother," I said. "I'll take the formula to Washington."

He stopped and stared. "Do you—yes," he went on slowly, "I can trust you."

"Of course you can," I said. "So let's get right at things. I'll wire that you're coming, and reserve a Pullman chair for you, while you're packing. There's a morning express at ten-fifteen, I think—strange—I overheard some one speaking about it in the Subway the other day. You can easily make it. Then when you're gone I'll fly down to Washington. But we'll have to hurry."

It meant real hurrying, too, and as it happened most of it devolved on me. After I'd done everything I could with telegraph and telephone and got Mrs. O'Malley to pack Mr. Kennedy's bag I had to tell Mr. Kennedy that he must wash his hands and put on proper clothes, for he couldn't travel in his laboratory outfit. He was running about like some one quite mad, and getting in my way dreadfully. Finally he was ready, in a perfectly presentable dark suit, and a soft hat, and an almost decently tied necktie, and even *gloves* sticking out of his pocket, and I was just going to rush him out to the waiting

taxi when I happened to think of something very important.

"But where's the formula?" I cried.

He rushed back to the laboratory and came out again with a thin blue envelope and a thick white envelope, both sealed. "Present that letter to the Chief of Ordnance," he said, meaning the white envelope, and this"—he touched the blue envelope—"this is the formula. Jove, I feel queer to have it all written down and out of my hands. If it was anybody but you—I'd never do it in the world. But I can trust you—I've proved it. Good-bye." And he nearly wrung my hands off and jumped out to the taxi.

I hurried to the door to look after him, and—I don't know why—but a little thrill of fear came to me. I was frightened, yes, actually frightened by that little blue envelope and what it meant. Common sense told me that the trip to Washington was very short, that I could have taxis, and be right among people every minute! Yet——

If I should lose the blue envelope or if it should pass out of my hands into the hands of any one save the Chief of Ordnance, it would mean that all Mr. Kennedy's work had gone for nothing, and—and—he'd

think I wasn't to be trusted. I made up my mind that that blue envelope was going to go with me to Washington and reach the right people—or else—well, it was going, that was all.

Then I remembered something that I'd once seen in the movies, and I walked back to my desk. I took a thin sheet of paper, slipped it in the typewriter, and wrote on it:

> The time has come, the walrus said,
> To talk of many things.
> Of shoes and ships and sealing wax
> Of cabbages and kings,
> And why the sea is boiling hot
> And whether pigs have wings!

I pulled the paper out of the machine, folded it, and put it into another blue envelope exactly like the other—there were plenty of them in my desk. I laid it aside with the white envelope containing the letter of introduction. Then I took off my hat—it was the one I'd bought with my own money—and I ripped open one of the velvet loops. I tucked the real blue envelope, the one with the precious formula, safely inside and sewed it there with tiny, close stitches, for I had my own little sewing kit with me, the one Antoinette had given me.

With the blue envelope safely concealed, and my hat on my head, and the false blue envelope and the white one put into my handbag, I prepared to travel, and my spirits quite suddenly rose. I felt that I was very much like the "beautiful Confederate spy," carrying despatches to General Lee—see third reel of any film of the Civil War era.

George went down to the train with me and after I had bought my ticket I called up Mrs. Harris's and told Viny, the maid, to tell her where I was going and that I might not be back until late that night. At last I was safely in a Pullman chair on the Washington Express, with two magazines to read, and a great opinion of my own importance. I had got on in the centre of a little group of passengers, but there were not very many people in the car. Seated across from me there was a respectable looking middle-aged woman dressed in mourning, and on either side of my chair there were quiet business men, absorbed in their newspapers. When the train had passed Manhattan Transfer, I turned my chair to the window so that I could count the money in my purse unobserved. Mr. Kennedy had pushed some bills into my hand along with the envelopes, but I wasn't sure how much I had and I certainly didn't want to be stranded in

Washington—though it was just possible that I might borrow from the Chief of Ordnance if I explained to him, and if he happened to be a nice man and properly appreciative of the sarnite formula.

Well, there was plenty—even if I stayed a week. Mr. Kennedy had been more than liberal. After I had counted the money and was just going to close my bag something made me suddenly look up—a sort of feeling that I was being stared at. Standing at the end of the car and looking right down toward me was the man Fischer. I jumped—he startled me so—and instantly he disappeared. A dozen impulses came to me—to call the porter, or the conductor, or to appeal to the woman across the aisle—but presently I grew more cool. After all, I was perfectly safe. It was daylight, there were ever so many people within call, and surely I was a goose to be so scared, especially as nothing had really happened. I picked up one of my magazines and tried to read.

Then something else occurred to me to puzzle me: Why hadn't the conductor collected my ticket? He might have gone through when I wasn't noticing, when I was counting my money, for instance; but it

was queer that he didn't come back. Neither Pullman nor train conductor came near me—I didn't even see them in the car.

I sat there wondering and worrying and pretending to read, but really watching for Fischer's reappearance—which didn't happen—until the train pulled into North Philadelphia. The two men on either side of me got up as if to get off and so did the woman opposite. Then she came to my chair, leaned down to me, and said in a low voice:

"We get off here. Come along with me quietly, or we will have to take you off by force."

I was so utterly dumbfounded by her words that I just sat still and stared at her.

"Why—what do you mean?" I stammered. "Who are you? Of course I shan't go with you!"

Meanwhile the two nice quiet business men who had been sitting on either side of me stood perfectly still, and I suddenly realized that they were acting in concert with the woman. It was a trap! And I had been very easily caught in it.

"Don't make a fuss," the woman said, still talking under her breath, but very threateningly, "I've got papers here showing that you're my niece and incorrigible, and that I'm taking you to a private

school where you're to be placed under restraint until you're twenty-one. These two men are detectives who have been sent by the judge in New York to help me in case you make any trouble. The conductor on the train knows us and so it won't do you any good to appeal to him." This in response to my wild glance about the car. "Come along, now," she repeated, and she took hold of my arm, and half lifted me from my seat.

I have often wished since that I *had* screamed and made a scene and appealed to the conductor and the people in the car and the policeman outside the station and every one else within hearing; but the woman's manner was so assured and so threatening, and the whole thing took me so much by surprise and seemed so diabolically perfect, that I couldn't think of anything to do or to say that would be at all adequate. The woman pulled at my arm and we four moved slowly out of the car, the two men acting as guards. We went out on the long concrete platform there at the North Philadelphia station and they hurried me over to the stairway which goes down to the street. A shabby limousine was waiting and into this the woman determinedly shoved me. She dismissed the two detectives

with a nod and a word and got in after me and closed the door behind her. While she was doing this I had tried the door on the other side of the limousine, thinking I might break away through it. It was fastened and immovable. The woman sat down beside me and as the limousine started she pulled down the shades, but not so quickly but that I had seen, sitting outside beside the man driving the car, Mr. Kennedy's sinister caller, Fischer, the man who had tried to bribe me into selling my employer's secrets.

"I am sorry to have frightened you," the woman said, in a rather apologetic voice, "but it was very sensible of you to come along quietly and not make a row. We were prepared for anything you might do, of course. But don't you go worrying about yourself—nothing is going to hurt you and we'll only keep you a few days—a week at the very longest. There's nothing to be scared of."

I didn't answer. I sat there turning the whole thing over in my mind. Of course, what they wanted was the sarnite formula, and in some way they had found out that I, and not Mr. Kennedy, was taking it to Washington. Equally, of course, they would want to keep me prisoner until the

man who stole the formula could get safely out of the country or could manage to dispose of it in some way. Fischer was evidently the man selected for the mission.

Well, he wasn't going to get that formula without some big trouble first. I made up my mind to *that!* The next question was, when would I be missed? If only I'd been able to talk to Mrs. Harris herself over the telephone. Viny, the maid who took the message, was perfectly capable of telling her that I'd gone to Washington to be gone a week, or something equally wild. She'd get it so mixed up that no one could tell what I really meant, and she might even forget that I'd said anything about Washington. George and Mrs. O'Malley knew nothing about the thing I was going to Washington to do, nor how long I intended to stay, so they wouldn't be surprised when I didn't come to work the next day. Minnie, of course, would wonder—I pinned my hope to Minnie, for though I wasn't so much on her mind as at first, she was always looking out for me. Mr. Kennedy was in Toronto, and it would be several days at least before he returned. If his mother was very ill he might stay a long time. I couldn't think of any one

except Minnie who would make any sensible effort to find out what had become of me!

Meanwhile the motor was going faster and faster —we had evidently reached the country roads, for they couldn't have run that fast in the city limits. I knew that I wouldn't be able to tell in what direction we were going, but at least I could approximate how far, just by the time it would take us. So I looked at my watch. I had left New York at half-past ten and it was now a quarter of one.

The woman beside me kept watchful eyes upon me. She was a big, strapping creature and now that she had pushed her heavy crêpe veil aside I could see, even in the dusk of the closed car, that she was decidedly common looking, though her face, with its heavy features, little dark eyes set close together and red complexion, was not without its force. Her mouth was big and rather good-humoured looking. I wondered if there might be a bare chance that I could win her over to sympathize with me. It wouldn't hurt to try—so I looked at her and smiled in as friendly a way as I could, though it was a severe strain on my facial muscles.

"I suppose I ought to be frightened," I said,

"but I can't be, with any one who looks as good-natured as you do."

I was right—she *was* good-natured, and at my words the corners of her mouth went up in a humorous grin. She pushed her veil farther back and gave her collar an impatient twitch.

"I'm too good-natured for my own good sometimes," she said, at once laying aside her dignified and impressive manner and correct English, and dropping into speech that suited her face. "But you're right, dearie, you don't need to be afraid of me—or of anybody else when I'm around. We won't hurt a hair of your head."

And there was the blue envelope, resting so near the "hair of my head." If she only knew *that.*

"Say, aren't you hungry?" she went on. "I nearly starve to death between meals. Look here."

She had a bulging suitcase with her and this she forthwith hoisted to her lap with an easy sweep of her fat arm. Either there was little or nothing in that suitcase despite its bulges, I reflected, or else she was an unusually husky woman. When she opened the lid and I saw the wedged-in contents I decided that my companion must have good muscles. She dug about a little and presently fished out a

dilapidated pasteboard box tied about with pink string. Down went the suitcase again, and *zisssssp*, the string was torn off the box. There were some solid-looking ham sandwiches, cold buttered biscuit, raisin cake, and oranges.

My companion offered me my choice of the box, and though I wasn't hungry I thought it would be better to accept something and eat it. She, meanwhile, had fallen to with a will. Over her raisin cake she became quite talkative.

"You're name's Brennan, isn't it?" she asked. "That's what they told me. It's kind of awkward not knowing each other's names. You can call me Mrs. Davis—Mrs. Augusta Davis is my full name."

"Oh!" said I, "I thought maybe you were Mrs. Fischer." And I nodded my head toward the front of the car where Fischer presumably was still sitting.

"Well, I guess not!" said Mrs. Davis, scornfully tossing her head. "That poor foreign fish! I wouldn't marry him under no circumstances—he makes me sick. Of course, I can see how you might have thought he was my husband, but he ain't. Believe me, dearie, I'm not doing anything as risky as this to oblige him or because he's a member of my family—for he's not. No, indeed, he's an agent,

just like I am, for *some very important people*, and we had our instructions to work together on this job. That's all. I guess you know what we're after, don't you?"

It seemed to me that frankness was the best thing—anyway I didn't have time to think of any trumped-up story. "I suppose you want to get Mr. Kennedy's sarnite formula," I said, as calmly as I could.

Mrs. Davis smiled at me jovially. "Of course, that's it," she said, "and you needn't be worried about anything happening to you. You just give us the formula like a good, sensible girl, and then I'll keep you with me for a few days, until—well—until it's all arranged what's to be done with it—and then you'll go back to your friends, not the least bit worse off from your little trip."

"But what would you do," I asked, "if after you let me go I should go at once to the police? Wouldn't they be able to hunt you down and arrest you, from my description?"

The good-natured creases around Mrs. Davis's mouth deepened again at mention of the police. "Now don't you go thinkin' about anything like that," she said, "it's all a pipe. To begin with, the police ain't likely to get me, and if they do—I got

friends. Dearie, don't you realize we couldn't put anything like this across unless we'd got powerful influence behind us? I should worry about the police. Here, have another piece of cake and forget 'em."

It would seem as if she had talked very openly—and yet, except for her name, she hadn't told me a thing that I hadn't known or suspected before. I rather liked her personally, and there was something in the way she promised that nothing should happen to me that sounded honest and dependable. Somehow I thought she meant it. I hoped so, for I didn't trust Fischer, certainly. He just made me shiver. I ate another piece of cake, and began to think, slowly and carefully, over what I must do in order to save the formula.

There was, of course, the fake formula—but would that deceive them? It certainly would not do it for long, if it did it at all. If I could get a chance to rip open my hat trimming and take out the real formula and destroy it—their plans would come to nothing in spite of anything they could do. They might wreak their vengeance on me—but I would have to chance that. I made up my mind firmly to two things—that I would try very hard to destroy the formula, and that in any case, they should never get it.

I knew that if I tore it up, no matter how small the pieces, they would patiently put it together again —it would only be a matter of time. If they took me anywhere where there was a fire I might burn it, even if I had to burn the hat, too. Heavens, I didn't want to burn my new hat! There was one other way—and that was to chew it up and swallow it—when I was a youngster in school one of the boys did that with a note that he didn't want to have fall into the teacher's hands. I had always remembered it—it was ingenious, even if it wasn't a very desirable method. *But they shouldn't have that formula*—no, not if I had to eat the hat itself. Mr. Kennedy had trusted me. I couldn't fail him.

## CHAPTER XII

THE automobile went on and on and on—usually over smooth roads, though occasionally we found rougher going. From the way the sunlight struck against the curtains of the car it seemed as though we must be going approximately northward. I tried to notice everything that might give me any possible clue, but it was so dark there inside the car, and I was so tired with all the emotions of the day that I got very drowsy. I settled back against the cushions and presently went to sleep, an uneasy, disturbed sleep, through which trailed a procession of threatening dream figures.

It was pitch dark when I woke up, and the car was bumping about dreadfully. An extra hard bounce threw me over against Mrs. Davis, and her voice brought me to my senses.

"That showfur must be a farmer and used to ploughing corn," she exclaimed bitterly; "or else we're jumpin' from crag to crag on the mountain tops! Are you hurt, dearie? I'll bet I've got a

black and blue spot as big as a saucer where I struck that door handle. My land, this has been some merry little picnic party, not!"

I wasn't hurt, and I said so. Mrs. Davis pounded on the glass behind the chauffeur and screamed at him to go more slowly; but he paid no attention and we were banged about unmercifully for the next twenty minutes or so. At last the car stopped and the door was opened from outside.

"Here we are," said Fischer. "Hustle out and get into the house."

"Hustle out, indeed," said Mrs. Davis, "and me probably lamed for life! What does that showfur think he is?" But she laboriously climbed out of the car, for all her lameness, and took hold of my arm in order to assure my accompanying her. We had stopped before a long, low house with a yard before it enclosed by an old-fashioned picket fence—I could make that much out in the dark, for it was now night. Fischer preceded us and we entered a gate and went up a walk, paved either with brick or stone. He did not knock or ring a bell, but opened the door, and we went into a dimly lighted hall and from there into a room at the left, furnished like any other country parlour might be. There was a lighted

hanging lamp over the centre table, and Fischer turned up the wick. Mrs. Davis and I sat down simultaneously on the haircloth sofa.

"Now," said Fischer, "give me that formula, Miss Brennan, and you will have nothing further to do. Mrs. Davis will stay here with you until she is notified to send you back to New York. It won't be long—probably three or four days, maybe a week."

With the weariness and the excitement, and the danger that I knew lurked behind his words, it was no wonder that I trembled. I shook from head to foot. I could hardly keep my teeth from chattering, and my hands were so unsteady that I could scarcely control them. This was the crucial moment. Slowly, while Mrs. Davis and Fischer both watched me closely, I opened my bag and took out the two envelopes—the white one addressed to the Chief of Ordnance, and the other—*the blue envelope.*

I held them out to Fischer without a word. "That's sensible," he said; I think he was relieved that I had not screamed and defied them.

He took the envelopes over to the centre table and opened them—the white one first—and he smiled as he read its contents, and when I saw that evil, contemptuous smile all my trembling left me. I was

suddenly coldly, dangerously angry. And I felt ready to cope with a dozen Fischers and Mrs. Davises.

He laid the white envelope on the table and then, very carefully, he opened the blue envelope and drew out the sheet of paper I had put in it. I almost laughed out loud at his face while he read it—those immortal words which concern the walrus's need of conversation. He did not crumple it in his hand and cry "Tricked!" as villains on the stage do, but he turned to me a black and threatening face.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

If I told him it was a fake—it ran through my head as swiftly as a flare of light—they might search me and find the real blue envelope. But if I said—— Why,of course, nothing easier.

"It's in cipher, of course," I said, looking Fischer in the eye. "Mr. Kennedy thought it rather a clever one."

He stared at me for a long, tense minute, but I stared back, as innocently as I could. Then he turned to Mrs. Davis. "Look," he said, holding out to her the slip of paper with that silly rhyme on it. They bent over it together in the yellow lamplight. Mrs. Davis drew a long breath.

"That's the outstanding limit!" she declared at

last. "What is the stuff, anyway? D'ju ever hear anything like it!" And she began laboriously to read: "The-time-has-come-the-walrus-said," in the same monotonous style that the small boy recites the reading lesson. "I can't make head nor tail of it," she wound up heavily. It was a great piece of luck that neither of them had ever read "Through the Looking Glass," it made the verse seem so much more like a real cipher to them.

Fischer considered and, as he considered, he watched me narrowly; but he got no clue. I sat still and looked tired and dispirited, which required no effort; but my heart was beating so hard that I could feel it in my throat, and I waited with every nerve strung tight for what he might say and do. At last he turned away and looked at the verse again—turned the paper over—held it up to the light and looked through it. At last he spoke.

"I'll get right back and turn it in," he said. "You know what you're to do. You'll probably get orders within a week."

Mrs. Davis surveyed him scornfully. "Yes," she said, "I know what I'm to do, and I don't require any information from you, Mr. Fischer. I was in this game before you was born, and I'll thank you

to remember it. If you're going back you'd better be moving, that's all I've got to say. I can attend to my end of the business."

Fischer did not answer her, though it was plain that he did not relish her words. He took from an inner pocket a leather case, and in it he carefully placed both envelopes, the white one and the false blue one. He closed the case, put it back in his pocket, and without saying good-bye to either of us he went out, closing the door behind him.

"I'm glad he's gone," said Mrs. Davis, "I never did like Fischer. Listen here, dearie—you're a real bright little girl, as I saw when you handed over the envelopes so cool. You know what your best interest is and I respect you for it. I got my orders not to let you out of my sight until I'm told to put you on the train for New York and, that being said, you can see that you can make it a good bit easier for yourself if you'll just be friendly and peaceable and don't try to get away. I'll tell you, too, this place is forty miles away from any living soul. Now, I'll be fair with you, if you'll be fair with me. I'm going to carry out my orders, of course, but that ain't any reason why we shouldn't be nice to each other. What say?"

It seemed the best course to meet her in an apparently frank and friendly spirit. "Why, of course, Mrs. Davis," I said, "I give you my word that I won't make any trouble. Of course, you know that I want to get away as soon as I can; but since I've got to stay here until you get orders to let me go, I might just as well make the best of it."

"Well, now, dearie," said Mrs. Davis, patting me on the shoulder, "you *have* got sense. Let's get the folks in and see if they haven't got some supper for us. I'm simply perishin' for food."

I waited with eager curiosity to see who "the folks" might be who belonged in this isolated house and lent themselves to such questionable enterprises. Mrs. Davis went to the back door of the little parlour and flung it open. "Mrs. Kroll! Mrs. Kroll!" she called. "How about some supper?"

There were sounds of some one hurrying about overhead and then silence for a second, and then heavy footsteps, evidently on some remote back stairs.

A door opened in the back and was banged to, and a moment later a tall young woman in a calico dress entered the door Mrs. Davis had flung open. She was not only young, she had a fresh, wholesome

face, and though she was awkward and dressed in the plainest country style, she was decidedly attractive.

"I heard you come in, Mis' Davis," she said, smiling, "but I calcalated you'n the doctor'd want to kind of get your niece used to the place before she saw any strangers. This her?" She turned and looked at me with lively curiosity. "Ain't it turrible how such things gets hold of young people! Why, she looks as right as anybody."

Mrs. Davis gave me a warning glance and Mrs. Kroll another.

"Sh," she cautioned, "she's sharp—you mustn't say anything before her to let on she's different from anybody else. We're both pretty well tired out and hungry, Mrs. Kroll."

"Of course," said Mrs. Kroll. "You go right upstairs an' lay off your things and wash up if you wanta, and I'll have supper on the table in three shakes. Doctor didn't stay?" She looked about questioningly.

"No, he had to go right on back," said Mrs. Davis. "We'll hurry."

"The lights is all lit," said Mrs. Kroll, following us out into the hall, and still eying me with uncontrollable eagerness.

Mrs. Davis and I went upstairs—I somewhat mystified; but as soon as we heard our hostess's footsteps retreating, Mrs. Davis whispered: "I told her you were a nut, not dangerous, you know, but just a little off. And she thinks Fischer is a doctor." She chuckled cheerfully. "Oh, my, dearie—this has been some neat little piece of scheming, believe me."

I couldn't help being amused, too; but as we went into the bedroom that had evidently been prepared for us, my anxiety for the real blue envelope, still sewed in the loops of my hat trimming, caught me with sudden strength. I didn't want to take that hat off and leave it upstairs, but if I kept it on Mrs. Davis would be suspicious at once and would probably search me. With her at my elbow it was impossible to get the blue envelope out of its hiding-place and destroy it. If there'd been an open fire in the room I believe I would have been tempted to throw the hat into it and watch it burn, even though it was the first hat I'd ever bought with money of my own earning, and mighty becoming, too—but there wasn't an open fire, so I didn't have that chance.

I took off my gloves and jacket slowly, as if I was

very tired, and put them in the closet. Then I unpinned my hat, giving the blue envelope a furtive "feel" to make sure it was still there, and put it on the shelf of the closet, and laid my little handbag beside it—but thought better of that, for if Mrs. Davis wanted to search my bag, the proximity to my hat might be dangerous. So I brought the handbag back and laid it on the dresser. As I did so, a sense of utter forlornness came over me. I seemed so helpless, so futile against the schemes of these horrible plotters. This woman who had been sent to guard me—she might seem kind and decent enough, but if she discovered that I was trying to trick her, what would she be then? Capable of any length of cruelty, I made no doubt. I thought of Uncle Bob, of dear Mrs. Alex, probably writing to me to-night and asking me if I was wearing my rubbers when it rained and if I was eating too much candy, and then, at last, of Ewan Kennedy, whose months of hard work were in danger from these thieves. And then I set my teeth. He'd trusted me with the blue envelope. I mustn't fail him. I mustn't!

"Here, dearie," said Mrs. Davis. "Here's a clean washrag for you and a new toothbrush, and a

comb. I knew you wouldn't have anything of your own with you and I brought everything you'd be likely to need—even a kimono!" She shook out a gaudy pink cotton garment as she spoke. "Cheap, but I guess it'll do," she commented.

"That was awfully kind," I said, as easily as I could. And with that I just jammed all my fears and misgivings back and slammed the door on them. After all, I was alive and well, supper was coming, I had a toothbrush and a kimono—and the blue envelope was still safe. I would not worry another instant.

Mrs. Kroll kept looking at me with such apprehensive interest during supper that it almost made me laugh—and Mrs. Davis, who missed nothing, winked at me jocularly behind our hostess's back. I managed to enjoy my supper, though, for Mrs. Kroll was a good cook, even if she did think I was crazy. Mrs. Davis yawned enormously over her dessert. "I'm ready to drop," she said. "I could go to bed right this instant." And I felt the same; but I was anxious to go to bed early for another reason—I meant to rescue the blue envelope as soon as Mrs. Davis went to sleep.

There were two beds in our room; I was glad of

that, for it made it less likely that I would disturb her. Imagine, then, how I felt when, just before turning out the light, she produced a light but very strong steel chain. "Now, dearie," she said persuasively, "just to satisfy my own mind, I'm going to fasten this around your wrist, and the other end around mine. It won't get in your way, for I'll leave it good and slack; but I'd be wakeful and disturbed all night long without doing it. You don't mind, do you?"

## CHAPTER XIII

I THOUGHT it best to seem acquiescent—it wasn't much use seeming anything else. "Of course not," I said, "but, truly, Mrs. Davis, you needn't worry about me trying to get away. I'm not so silly as to think I could."

"Oh, yes, yes," she nodded, "you're dead right about that. But just to satisfy me, dearie—just to make me more peaceful."

So I submitted, with inward rage. And my hat, and the blue envelope, might have been in Timbuctoo instead of ten feet away, for all the possibility that I could get them undetected. Still, it didn't spoil my rest, for I was sound asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow and I never woke up until late in the morning. I didn't know where I was when I first waked, and it took several moments of staring at the whitewashed walls and the funny old pictures before I realized it—a snore from Mrs. Davis helped.

It was very dark and shadowy in the room, though my watch told me it was half-past nine; but rain was

dashing against the windows and black clouds hung low in the sky. Not much chance to escape from my jailer on a day like this.

When Mrs. Davis did at last wake up, she was as amiable as before, and took the chain off my wrist with something approaching apology. We went down to breakfast, and had a very good meal of country ham and eggs, fried mush and crab-apple jelly, served with the same seasoning of Mrs. Kroll's curiosity.

Then began the longest, most wearisome day of my life. The rain poured—and poured—and poured. There was nothing to do except sit and talk to Mrs. Davis, or try to read the *Farmer's Almanac*, or two Bertha M. Clay novels in the last stages of dilapidation, which was all of Mrs. Kroll's library. Mrs. Davis's good humour and likeableness soon wore thin and she showed her real self, coarse and callous. I hated her before night came. She was at my elbow every second; I didn't dare so much as look at my hat with the hidden blue envelope, I was so afraid of arousing her suspicions. The only gain I made during the day was that I learned that Mr. Kroll was absent and would not be back until the following afternoon. There didn't seem to be a

hired man, or, indeed, any one about the place except Mrs. Kroll. She said something, too, that made me think the farm was not so isolated as Mrs. Davis had told me. For one thing, there was a telephone; but when Mrs. Davis, along in the afternoon, announced her intention of using it, Mrs. Kroll threw up dismayed hands.

"It's out of kilter," she announced. "Bin so since day before yisteddy, an' I forgot to tell y'. Want that I should ride over to Nasworthy's and send word f'r y'?"

Mrs. Davis said shortly that it wouldn't be necessary, but she threw me an uneasy glance as if she was afraid of what I might have gathered from the conversation. I tried to look uninterested and unconscious—but I don't know that I succeeded. After that, when she wanted to talk to Mrs. Kroll, Mrs. Davis would stick her head through the kitchen door and whisper.

The next morning was as full of sunshine as the day before had been of rain. As soon as breakfast was over I asked Mrs. Davis if we couldn't go outside and get some air, since the day was so beautiful. She said she didn't mind, so we went upstairs and put on our hats and jackets. On the pretext of

getting a handkerchief out of my bag, I slipped my money into my jacket pocket but ostentatiously left the handbag on the dresser. It gave me a reassuring thrill to pin my hat on my head and feel the blue envelope still in the ribbon loop. If Mrs. Davis had not been there, I'd have had it out and utterly destroyed *somehow* in a twinkling. But Mrs. Davis was there, and it was my part to throw her off her guard if possible. I must get away before Fischer came back, or before any word came from the head of this conspiracy—for I didn't know what the word might be.

Certainly the view from the front door as we stepped out was lonely and desolate enough. The house, except for its little yard, seemed surrounded by uncultivated fields, with little groves and fringes of woods here and there among them. We walked down the brick pathway which led to the gate—flowers were coming up on either side of it, daffodils. Outside there was no road in sight, and as I looked about I could see no neighbouring house, nor even a smoke spiral to indicate that there were neighbours anywhere near—no, not one sign of human life as far as I could see in any direction. To be sure, the country was hilly and I could not see very far, but

it gave me a dreadful sense of being imprisoned, shut in by barriers more impossible to pass than walls of stone or iron bars. Mrs. Davis and I walked about briskly for a few minutes—and oh, how I chattered! She has never been better entertained from that day to this, I know. The lowing of a cow made an excuse for going around the house to see the barn. It wasn't a very big barn, and it looked out of proportion to the long, low old house; but I insisted that we go into it—and I was rewarded. There were two cows and only one horse, and there wasn't a sign of a hired man, or any one in fact. So I felt pretty certain that if I tried to run away pursuit would have to consist of Mrs. Kroll or Mrs. Davis mounted on that one horse.

We were passing the little feed room built on the end of the barn farthest from the house, and Mrs. Davis and I paused to look in at the corn and oats stored there. "I wonder what's in the barrel," I said.

Mrs. Davis advanced a step. "Bran or meal for the cows, I expect," she said, briskly. "Oh, I'm a great old country woman—I know all about that sort of thing."

What she said next I don't know, but I know it

was something forcible. With one quick jump I pushed her inside with all my strength, banged the door to, and shot the big bolt that fastened it. It was a heavy door, well built, but I didn't wait to see if it was going to withstand Mrs. Davis's muscle. I ran like mad round into the horse stall, snatched a bridle from the wall and slipped the bit into the docile old thing's mouth, backed him out near the fence, and via that fence scrambled on his back, without a saddle or even a blanket.

Shrieks and bangings came faintly from the feed room, but I didn't even look to see if Mrs. Kroll might be coming to the rescue of my erstwhile jailer. I kicked my feet against the old horse's ribs and urged him into a lumbering trot that nearly jolted me off with every step. I headed him across the fields behind the barn, where there seemed to be a gap between the hills.

If any one had seen me, I suppose he or she would have sat down and nearly died laughing. I thought of that afterward—but at the time I was so busy trying to get a reasonable distance between me and Mrs. Davis that I had no time to imagine passers-by and the effect the sight of me might have on them. Besides, it was awfully rough travelling, and my

steed in his palmiest days was never a lady's saddle horse. However, I did manage to keep on and to make my horse go, and when at last I turned to look back, I must have been a mile away for the house looked very tiny. I pulled my horse down to a walk and kept him steadily headed toward the gap in the hills.

We must have travelled three or four miles when we struck a rough roadway, and down this I turned. Of course, I didn't dare stop, but I was so shaken up and uncomfortable from riding such a distance without a saddle that I got off and walked a bit just to rest myself. The road turned into a wood and I followed it. On and on and on we went, through the fragrant pines. Certainly the Fischer and Davis pair had made no mistake in choosing a deserted country. Where—where on earth could I be? Was I really only a few hours from Philadelphia? It seemed perfectly incredible. Well, I must arrive somewhere, some time! So I pushed on, sometimes on horseback and sometimes on foot, for the better part of two hours. And then—my bumpy, wandering road led me out of the woods and right up to a neat little farm and a respectable little house, painted white, and looking very much as if

it had strayed from some prim New England village.

I got off and knocked at the door. It was opened by a stout, capable-looking woman, who looked at me with more curiosity than even Mrs. Kroll had done.

"Is this Mrs. Nasworthy?" I asked, remembering the name Mrs. Kroll had used.

"Laws, no," she returned. "Was you looking for Nasworthys'? They're quite a ways from here—over beyond the Krolls'. How'd you ever get so far out of your way?"

"I don't know," I said. "I was just stupid, I suppose. This country is so very little settled. I've seen no place or no one to ask."

The stout lady smiled a superior smile and burst into voluble speech. "That's what I often say to Jabez. 'Jabez,' I say, 'if we didn't know where to find the neighbours, I'd feel as if we hadn't none.' But they ain't so far, if you get used to it. When we first come out here I was as lonesome as a cat in a strange garret, but we bin out here seven year now and I never think nothing about it. Besides, we're busy; we got a dairy farm. Everybody specializes in something round here—Nasworthys is chickens, Marshs' is early vegetables, Krolls'

is summer boarders." She caught her breath. "Don't I run on though!" she said, "an' I ain't helpin' you a bit forrader. You want to go to Nasworthys', do you?"

"I believe," I said, cautiously, "since I've come so far out of the way, I'll just go back to town. Your husband—is he here? Could he possibly take me? My horse is tired." I waved my hand vaguely back at my charger.

"Why, I don't know but you could ride along with him. He's just about ready to go down t' the creamery with the milk. He's fixin' to go in the auto. But, say, what'll you do with your horse?"

This was a question! I turned and surveyed the animal, and literally racked my brains for an answer. Then an inspiration seized me. "Mrs. Kroll is a friend of mine," I said, "and he belongs to her. Can't your husband, or maybe your little boy, take him over there for me to-day or to-morrow? I'll gladly pay for the kindness. Just tell Mrs. Kroll that Mrs. Davis's niece sent it."

Heaven only knows what the stout lady thought. But the bill I held out to her was sufficient persuasion. She decided that she could send the

horse back (sure enough, she did have a son, a shy little fellow about ten years old who peeped at me from afar), and she asked me in to rest, an invitation I accepted.

It wasn't very restful, though, for I didn't know what Mrs. Davis might resort to next. She seemed to me to be perfectly capable of summoning a motor or an aeroplane and hunting me down in short order. While I sat there, looking out of the window to see if any one was coming and wishing fervently that Jabez and the auto would appear, naturally I thought of the blue envelope. There was a bright fire in the stout lady's kitchen stove—I could see it through the half-opened door—and the thought occurred to me that now was my chance to rip the blue envelope out of its hiding-place and burn it. But something held me back. I wanted now, more than anything else, to put the blue envelope in Ewan Kennedy's hands, unopened, so that he would know that it was really, truly, saved from the thieves. My decision was punctuated by the chug of the auto that was to bear me and the fateful blue envelope into town—what town, I did not know, and did not want to ask, but which would be reasonably sure to have a telegraph wire and a railroad.

Jabez proved to be as fat as his wife, and as silent as she was talkative. He and I and the milk cans rattled along the road in his funny little old car with a good bit of speed, once we got started. Remembering Mrs. Davis's assertion that we were forty miles away from anywhere, I was amused, and oh, how relieved! to see how many farms there were on the road we travelled, and presently, when we turned onto a smooth, macadam highway and the houses were larger and more prosperous, and we saw many more people, I began to feel almost safe again. Not quite, though. I found myself wondering if I would ever feel really safe again, after such an experience.

"Where do you want to go to, Miss?" at last asked the hitherto speechless Jabez.

"To the telegraph office," I said, and the words were hardly out of my mouth when we dipped and turned and ran down a long hill into a quiet little town right before us.

"Telegraph office is down at the station," said Jabez.

So there was a railroad—and real trains that would carry me away from my ominous captors. My heart fairly jumped at the words. No Cook's tourist ever looked so happily at the Louvre or West-

minster Abbey as I looked at that grubby, untidy station. I wanted to sing and shout, but I merely got out of the automobile, insisted on paying Jabez well, but not too liberally, for I didn't know how much money I might need, and hurried into the station.

An elaborately indifferent station agent replied to my questions. "Yas, thurr was a train to Philadelphy 'n about a nour. It 'uz 'n accommodation. It 'ud take three hours t' get t' Philadelphy. Fare's two-eighty-seven."

I bought a ticket, and then I walked outside to see what the name of the town might be, and discovered it painted on the side of the station—"Fairhope." Certainly an auspicious name, but I hadn't the slightest idea as to whether it was in Pennsylvania or New Jersey, and I didn't want to ask the ticket agent any more questions. I was in two minds about sending telegrams—it didn't seem much use to send one to Mr. Kennedy, since he was in Toronto, and certainly there was no use to send one to Uncle Bob, since he wasn't aware of my adventure. I thought long and hard about it and finally I went inside and wrote two telegrams—one to Minnie:

Everything is all right. Will return to New York this evening. LESLIE BRENNAN.

The other was longer and very melodramatic, I'm afraid, but I couldn't think of anything else to do that would be the slightest safeguard to me, and I wasn't even sure that this would be. So, to the Chief of Police, New York, I sent the following:

While carrying secret powder formula for Ewan Kennedy, 567 Shade Avenue, the Bronx, to Chief of Ordnance of War Department, Washington, was kidnapped and taken from train at North Philadelphia by woman calling herself Augusta Davis with accomplice named Fischer; took me to Krolls' farm near Fairhope; have escaped; will take one o'clock train for Philadelphia. Please have train crew asked to look out for me; fear further trouble. New York address is with Mrs. Harris, 70 East Nineteenth Street.

LESLIE BRENNAN.

The stodgy ticket agent's eyes bulged when he read this—no wonder! "Say," he burst out, "you must be bughouse! I know them Krolls, and they're all right."

"There's the telegram," I said; "it's your business to send it. How much will it be?" And he subsided with mutterings. Presently I heard him clicking it off, and though I didn't suppose that the Chief of Police would pay any attention to it, it made me feel safer. Besides, if Mrs. Davis and

Fischer *should* turn up and find that I had sent that telegram, it might make them hesitate to lay hands on me again.

So down I sat to wait for the train—keeping an eye on the only road of approach to the station, for I was apprehensive.

The minutes crawled by. A few people lounged into the station—the usual train-time crowd of the small town. A bus with jangling bells drove up, and one of the travelling man species alighted and made a great to-do about getting some trunks checked, and the stodgy station agent finally attended to them with the air of one who considers checking trunks a personal grievance. We all waited. At last there was a slight stir, and some one said: "Here she comes," and I went out on the platform and saw, away down the track, the train approaching, looking, at that distance, like a little mechanical steaming toy. Then the harsh squawking of an automobile horn rent the air. I turned. Not fifty yards from the station came an open car, violently driven, and standing in the back and waving her arms was Mrs. Davis!

The train was almost in. I didn't hesitate a second, but ran straight across the track.

## CHAPTER XIV

THERE was a little rough shed across the track, a sort of primitive freight house, probably, and I ran to this, and round behind it as the train came thundering in. As I ran I thought despairingly that if Mrs. Davis did not find me among the crowd at the station she would *have* to stop and ask questions, and I hoped that the surly station agent and the stupid country crowd might be surly and stupid enough to baffle her until the train got away.

But I had no intention of letting that train go without me. It was my only hope of escape. I ran along back of the shed until I had reached the other end of it, and there I peeped cautiously around. The end of the last car was right in front of me and it was well below the station. My chance of getting away lay in reaching the car without being seen. I did not wait to think or consider what would happen if Mrs. Davis saw me now, but ran forward desperately, reached up and pulled myself onto the

lowest step, at the very back—and as I did it the train slowly started.

The door was open; I gained the platform, hurried in and shut it behind me, only leaving a crack to see the station as we went by. My heart was beating so hard it seemed to me it would jump out of my body, and my hands were shaking so that I could not keep the door steady. I could hardly hold myself still to look—but it was all over in an instant, for the train gathered speed, but it did not go so fast that I didn't see what I wanted to see. Mrs. Davis was on that station platform—on the *platform*, thank heaven, and not on the train—waving her arms and apparently shrieking at the station agent who looked bewildered and more surly than ever. He was shaking his head—she'd have difficulty getting anything satisfactory out of *him*. I wondered if he would tell her about the telegrams I sent. The train put on more speed and we rounded a curve, so that I could see nothing more.

Then I just fell into the nearest seat. If there'd been any one with me I'd have had hysterics, then and there; but it's astonishing how well you can control yourself when there's no sympathetic person near to take a pleasant interest in your emotions!

I was shaky and my heart still pounded away like mad, but the blue envelope and I were on the high road to freedom! I felt it in my bones. I was almost certain that Mrs. Davis wouldn't dare wire to any of her gang to kidnap me again, though she might telegraph or telephone a warning to them that I had escaped. I certainly did hope that the station agent would show her my telegrams—especially the one I sent to the Chief of Police. That, I felt, might give even her hardened sensibilities a distinct shock.

Pretty soon the conductor came through the train, and when he got to me he stopped and looked at me very interestedly.

"I didn't see you get on," he said.

"No," I said, "I almost missed the train and had a dreadful run for it, and had to jump on at the back at the very last minute."

That explanation seemed to satisfy him. He was rather a dull-looking old fellow, and he punched my ticket and went on his way without asking any questions. The train went on very slowly, stopping at every station, at every crossroads, it seemed to me, and taking the longest time to put on and take off a few bits of freight or a passenger or two. After the

first few stations were passed, I calmed down a good bit—I had been somehow expecting that Mrs. Davis would make more trouble for me: send telegrams to intercept me; or do *something* to harass and injure me, so that every time we got safely away from a station I felt relieved and thankful.

We must have been on the way about an hour and a half, I suppose, when, soon after we had left one of the little stations that were dotted along the track about three telegraph poles apart (or so it seemed to me), I noticed the conductor and the brakeman coming toward me. There was a telegram in the conductor's hand and he seemed quite excited.

"There, now—she's done it!" I said to myself, and instinctively braced myself for the worst. I didn't know what I was going to do this time, but I made up my mind that if they tried to take me off that train I'd fight—I'd bite and scratch and kick and scream and make such an enormous row that some one would *have* to interfere. I was desperate.

The two men came on down the car aisle, directly toward me, looking at each passenger as they passed, and then back at the telegram. At last they stopped beside the seat where I sat cold all over with un-

certainty, and the conductor, again looking at the telegram and then at me, asked:

"Is this—are you, Miss—Miss Leslie Br—B-r-e-Brennan?"

"Yes, I am," I said, clearly, thinking it strange that Mrs. Davis should have used my real name and wondering what the new trap might be. "What do you want?"

The old conductor scratched his head and looked puzzled. "Well," he said slowly, "I got a wire here saying I'm to look out f'r y', and see that you reach Philadelphia safe. It's signed by the superintendent of the road. Says to tell y' y'r uncle and other friends'll meet you there and that search is being made f'r Mrs. Davis and her associates—whatever that may mean," he added, squinting at the telegram again as if he'd never seen anything like it before.

Oh, the thrill of that announcement! I could have hugged and kissed that old conductor and the brakeman, too, though both of them were untidy and the brakeman was a tobacco chewist of the more industrious kind. I wanted to cry and I wanted to laugh and I wanted to jump up and down and I wanted to shout! I was safe at last! My telegram to Minnie or the one to the Chief of Police had given

them the clue! They were waiting for me! They were ready to protect me—no, they were already protecting me! Three cheers!

I managed to conceal these feelings from the conductor and to thank him coherently, and then I sat back in that dirty little accommodation coach and fairly revelled in my blessed new sensations of safety and peace. What did anything matter now, except to reach my journey's end? Oh, how impatient I was at the slowness of the train. I wanted to get out and push it along the track—anything to hurry it along. It lingered and loitered, and if there had seemed to be a station after every three telegraph poles before, there seemed to be one at *every* telegraph pole now. Never in the world was there such a slow poke of a train as that one. I thought of the train Bill Nye once travelled on, where they put the cowcatcher on the last car for fear a cow might walk in and bite the passengers, and that seemed such a superlatively funny thing to me that I startled the nearest passenger, a large lady with twin children, by giggling aloud. I was foolishly happy with relief from my long tension.

The slowest trains must arrive some time—even if one thinks up taunting jokes about them—

and this train was no exception. Of course, it was late, but then—no matter. It reached Philadelphia finally and I was the first person out of it, and there —there was Uncle Bob, and there was Mr. Kennedy —and there was Minnie, yes, and a strange man. Oh, how worn and anxious and distressed they all looked and how miraculously the expression of their faces changed when they saw me.

They all rushed for me and I rushed for them. Every one seized me and, in the confusion I—well —I know I kissed Mr. Kennedy—and I think I may have kissed the strange man. He was a plain-clothes man from the Bureau of Detectives sent over by the New York Chief of Police, I found out later. His name was O'Neill and he had a heart-warming smile and a darling tang of Irish in his speech.

"Oh, Leslie, Leslie!" Minnie was saying, and clinging to me.

"Oh, Leslie, my dear little girl," Uncle Bob was saying and clinging to me, too. Poor Uncle Bob, he nearly cried.

And I wasn't sure, but I thought I heard Mr. Kennedy say, "Oh, Leslie, *darling!*"—but I set that down to my excitement, for, of course, he'd never

have said anything like that. And I know he didn't cling to me, but he stayed as close to me as he could get, with Uncle Bob and Minnie already on either side.

"I thought I'd go crazy," Minnie said; "that idiot maid at Mrs. Harris's didn't know a thing, and first she said you'd gone to Washington for the night and then she said you'd said you would be gone a week, and then she said she didn't know *what* you'd said—and then you didn't come home and I had no word of you—well, I just went right off my nut."

"You see," broke in Mr. Kennedy, edging nearer, "that wire, you know, the one telling me my mother was ill, that was all a fake—a ruse to get me out of the way."

"It was!" I exclaimed; "but you got to Toronto before you found it out, of course?"

"That's the strange part of it," he said, "I didn't go on to Toronto. I might have gone on, not knowing anything about it, but when we were about halfway—three or four o'clock in the afternoon, it was—the train was stalled by a big wreck on the road. I got out and fidgeted about a bit, and saw that it would be a matter of hours before we could go on——"

"So he very cleverly walked to the nearest town to telephone," broke in Uncle Bob, "and finally got his sister on the long distance——"

"She told me," went on Mr. Kennedy, who apparently didn't relish having his story told for him, "that the Mater wasn't ill at all—quite the contrary, in fact, and she hadn't sent me any telegram at all. Of course, I suspected something serious at once. I telephoned back to New York and found that you'd gone with the blue envelope long before."

He stopped and drew a long breath, and Uncle Bob promptly broke in again. "He'd have come right back, you see, Leslie," he said, "but on account of the wreck there were no trains running either way, and it was not until the next morning that he reached New York——"

"And then," went on Mr. Kennedy, taking the words out of Uncle Bob's mouth, "I started an investigation immediately, though I feared what had been done. The railroad people found out for me that you had left the train with a woman and two men, and that you had been represented as feeble-minded——"

"Oh," I said, and burst out laughing, "that was Mrs. Davis and the detectives. She told the woman

at the farm where she took me that I was a 'nut,' but that she mustn't let me see she thought me different from any one else!"

At this Uncle Bob nearly burst with rage. "They'll pay for this," he almost shouted, brandishing his cane.

"Yes," went on Mr. Kennedy—it was evident that he was bound to tell it all, "you had been represented as the feeble-minded and incorrigible niece of this woman, who was supposed to be taking you to an asylum."

They then all broke in and talked so fast that Mr. Kennedy was simply swamped, and for a while I couldn't make out anything more; but gradually I collected the following facts:

The police were called in. Minnie, who had been telephoning every hour to Mr. Kennedy, simply took a vacation from her work and devoted herself to searching for me; Uncle Bob was wired for—and everything went wildly boiling round and round. But they were absolutely unable to trace me after I got into the motor there at North Philadelphia. The policeman outside the station had noticed the car, but he didn't know its number and he hadn't even seen which way it went. They were up against

perfect blankness—not a clue to be had anywhere it seemed.

My telegram to Minnie was the first intimation they had of my whereabouts, and then, a little later, came the telegram to the Chief of Police. How they praised me for sending that! The plain-clothes man said it was the smartest thing he had ever heard of, the way I had given every detail and made everything so clear. He said I ought to be a detective, but Uncle Bob gave him a glare at that.

After that telegram came the police, who got in touch with the railroad people and had the superintendent wire to the conductor to take care of me. And they had rushed men out to Krolls' to catch Mrs. Davis. (N. B. They didn't get her.)

Finally, when they had all talked until they were worn out, it was my turn, and I began to tell my adventures from the time I got on the train at New York. I told how Mrs. Davis took me off the train, and of the long ride in the closed limousine, and of our arrival at Krolls', and our stay there; of the chain that she put on my wrists at night—I thought Mr. Kennedy would choke with rage about that, and Uncle Bob, too, while Minnie thought it quite a clever idea of Mrs. Davis's—and then at

last I told of walking out to the barn and how I pushed Mrs. Davis into the feed room, and fastened her in, and how I rode away on my ungainly white charger, and finally got to the station and on the train.

Then I unpinned my hat and took it off.

"Lend me your knife, will you, please, Uncle Bob?" I asked.

He took out his nice old-fashioned pocket knife and handed it to me, and I began to rip open the loop of the velvet trimming, while they all watched me with amazement. I had sewed it very tight, but finally I got it open. Then I slipped my fingers inside and took out—the blue envelope!

"Here is the sarnite formula," I said, handing it to Mr. Kennedy, "all safe and sound."

He sat still and held it in his hand as if he were dazed.

"Why—I'd forgotten all about—*that*," he said; "it was your safety, not the formula's, I was thinking about. You—you know that, don't you?" And as he said it he raised his eyes and looked at me differently than he had ever looked at me before. It embarrassed me so that I could not answer, but I liked it, too.

"For goodness' sake!" exclaimed Minnie, "what a little meek-looking envelope to make all this fuss about. How did you ever save it? I should think they'd have got onto the fact that you'd hidden it, and frisked you."

So now I had something more to tell—how I had written "The time has come the walrus said" on my typewriter and put it into another blue envelope and passed it off for the real one, which was sewed into my hat-trimming all the time.

"When Fischer opened it, and read the verse," I wound up, "I just told him it was the formula in cipher."

With that the plain clothes man let out a regular war-whoop of a laugh. "That beats all!" he said, slapping his knee. "How did you ever in this round world come to think of that, Miss Brennan, may I ask?"

"It's the proper thing to do when you carry important papers," I told him, "they always do it in novels and on the stage and in the movies."

He laughed about it for ever so long. "It takes us Irish," he kept saying; and even after we got on the train for New York, he sat and chuckled to himself about how the people who had hired Fischer and

Mrs. Davis must have worked at that silly verse, trying to get a formula for an explosive out of it. I don't believe that plain clothes man had had such a good time for months.

We had dinner on the train, and though it was night when we reached New York, Mr. O'Neill wanted me to go to Police Headquarters to look through the pictures in the Rogues' Gallery and see if I could find Fischer and Mrs. Davis there. Uncle Bob and Mr. Kennedy and Minnie went along with me. Not one of them was contented to let me out of sight for a second. I believe they were afraid that I might be kidnapped again at any moment, though Mr. O'Neill said that the gang was probably making their get-away as fast they could go, that is, if there was a gang. He surmised that there were very few people in it except Fischer and Mrs. Davis—they, of course, reporting to some one who had engaged them, and who had planned the thing.

I found Mrs. Davis in the Rogues' Gallery without much of a search, and what a record she had! confidence work, blackmail, all kinds of ugly things. Her real name was Sarah Dimling, and they told me that she was one of the smartest and most dreaded woman criminals in the country, and that under the

circumstances, I was very lucky to get away from her alive. Mr. O'Neill said cheerfully that she'd have murdered me just as soon as not to get the formula, if she could have been sure that she could dispose of my body. And Mr. Kennedy told him sharply that he mustn't say things like that to me, for I'd had a dreadful experience and had suffered a terrible nervous shock. It was the first I'd heard of any nervous shock. And fancy Mr. Kennedy thinking of it!

Fischer's picture was not in the Rogues' Gallery, and the detective said he was probably a foreign crook operating temporarily in this country, or maybe brought over here specially for the job. They had me describe him as closely as I could and said they might be able to get him; but with the start he'd got, they feared they wouldn't.

It was very late when I finally got back to Mrs. Harris's, and there was a great argument over my going there at all. Uncle Bob said he thought I'd better come to his hotel, for he'd not feel safe about me unless I was under the same roof with him; but Mr. O'Neill told him not to worry about my safety, for I'd be protected from now on until they were satisfied that all danger to me was past, and I must

say I wanted to go to my own little room and see my own brush and comb and toothbrush, and sleep in my own bed. I felt as if I'd been away a thousand years, when I went up those steps that night! I was surprised to see that the place was still the same. Mrs. Harris was waiting for me, and several of the boarders—all so excited and so glad to see me—and they made a perfectly lovely fuss over me. It was dear of them, and I appreciated it so much—well, I almost cried.

Mr. Kennedy had been very silent ever since I gave him the untouched blue envelope, but when he left he said he would telephone the first thing in the morning to find out how I was feeling, and that I was not to come back to work until I was perfectly rested and all myself again. He said it quite crossly, like a command. And then he shook hands with me and fairly flew away.

When Minnie and I were at last alone upstairs, she laughed a little about his manner. "It's all very well," she said, "for him to act peeved and indifferent now, but believe me, he was some wild Indian when he heard you had been kidnapped."

"Oh, that was on account of the formula," said I, hastily. "Of course he'd be worried sick when he

thought his formula was stolen after all the months of work he has put on it."

"Oh, no," said Minnie dryly, "it wasn't the loss of the formula and the thought of all the wasted work that ailed him—far from it. And, by the way, what was it he said when we met you in that grand rush at Philadelphia? What did he call you, I mean?"

I could feel the colour simply flooding up into my face until it burned. "I'm sure I don't know," I storied shamefully; "we were all talking at once, seems to me. I wish I knew whether or not I kissed that funny Mr. O'Neill."

Minnie shook her head. "Oh, Leslie, Leslie," she mourned, "you are the *limit*. Well, I won't tease you any more to-night. But to-morrow, Miss, have a care."

And then she kissed me and went over to her own room. I wondered if he had really said "Leslie, darling"—no, he just couldn't have—and yet—I was pretty sure he had. And then the way he had looked at me—and the way his voice had sounded when he said it wasn't the safety of the formula he had cared about! Well—I know that if I had been Daisy I shouldn't have liked it.

## CHAPTER XV

I WAS very tired the next morning, for the reaction after all the excitement had set in. I felt beaten and sore all over, as if I had gone in swimming for the first time in the season—and you know how sore and stiff that makes you. Minnie had run in for a moment before she went to work, but that was long before I actually woke up, and now and then I had been cognizant of stealthy footsteps outside my door—Mrs. Harris, I suppose, or the repentant Viny who got my telephone message so mixed. It was the greatest comfort to think that I didn't need to get up until I felt like it, and when Mrs. Harris looked in again and found my eyes really open she asked me—no, she insisted—that I have my breakfast in bed.

So up came poor old Viny with a tray, and with no end of contrite speeches about the telephone message. "But," she wound up, "it ain't no use—when I hear a voice inside that thing, talkin' right into my ear, I kinda lose my wits, like. And lawsy

goodness, I'm fergettin' somethin' else. The boy said they was to be give to you soon's you woke up."

She hurried out and presently came back with a great basket full of flowers—pink roses and mignonette and apple blossoms and white pansies—the most beautiful, the most perfumed thing! Of course the first thing I did was to ask for the card—but, lo and behold, there was no card in it; so I rather thought Uncle Bob must have sent it, and I decided that his taste in flowers was almost too good to be true. I lay there in bed and feasted on toasted buns and the exquisite flowers simultaneously, and felt a little bit like the once-upon-a-time Leslie Brennan, who had had so many flowers sent to her and who had breakfasted in bed more often than not. How far away and unreal that Leslie Brennan seemed now.

After a while Viny came back to tell me—very proud of having remembered it all the way upstairs—that Mr. Kennedy had telephoned, and said that I was on no account to go to work that day. Very nice of him I thought, but then I hadn't intended to. I wanted a day of perfect ease and leisure, with no kidnappers to elude, no bareback horse to ride, no blue envelopes to guard, nothing to do but just play around and feel gloriously safe. Oh, to have the

terrible strain all over and done with, and to know that I was guarded—it was the most heavenly sensation.

But it wasn't necessary to have all my fun in just being safe, for Uncle Bob was in town and that meant that he would be planning some sort of special good time for me—I knew it—maybe a matinee, or perhaps he would take Minnie and me to dinner at one of the beautiful big hotels where the orchestra plays "Tales of Hoffman" and "Madame Butterfly," and all the things to eat match the music.

My expectations must have wirelessed themselves to him somehow, for sure enough, after I had at last made up my mind to leave that comfortable bed, and was dressing and doing my hair in the laziest way imaginable, another telephone message came, this time from Uncle Bob, and he asked me to go to luncheon with him.

Of course, I wanted to look as well as possible, so I gave my poor little tired blue suit a good brushing and sewed up the ripped loop of my hat where the fateful blue envelope had been hidden. Both suit and hat had gone through my strenuous experience pretty well, I thought, when I'd got them on.

Then I hunted up a pair of fresh white gloves, and lastly I made myself a darling nosegay from my basket of flowers and pinned it festively in the front of my jacket. I looked very nice—if I do say it myself. Uncle Bob said it, too, when he saw me.

"Are you very tired?" he asked solicitously.

"I thought I was before I got up," I said; "but I'm not a bit tired now—honestly, I don't feel as if I ever *was* tired."

"Then suppose we walk up the Avenue," he suggested, "for I should like the world to see what a beautiful young lady is willing to walk with an old man like me."

As Minnie would say, that was "going some" for Uncle Bob, but I think he felt fonder of me than he ever had before, and he didn't mind showing it now that I'd been in such danger.

We went out in the sunshine—on the gayest, most varied, most brilliant thoroughfare in the world—Fifth Avenue—and strolled along happily.

"Were you very much frightened, Leslie," asked Uncle Bob, "when you found that you had been kidnapped and that you were in the hands of a gang of criminals?"

"Uncle Bob," I said, "I was just simply scared to

death. I was so scared I wonder I didn't die of it. But all the same, I couldn't let them know I was scared. That was the one thing I kept thinking of, not to let them know how helpless and weak and ineffectual I felt. I mean that was the one thing I kept thinking of—except that I must save the blue envelope."

"If you'd given it up," said Uncle Bob, "you'd have been in no danger whatever. I must say that I am disgusted with Kennedy for letting a delicate girl like you run such a risk. I told him when I first arrived that I considered him as criminal as any one of the band who had conspired to kidnap you."

"You're very unjust," I said, "and that's not like you, Uncle Bob. You know any one might have done the same. Why, I never thought of any danger—I put the blue envelope inside my hat bow more for a joke than anything else. I don't think you ought to blame Mr. Kennedy."

To my great surprise, instead of going on and laying down the law to me about it, Uncle Bob dropped the subject right there; and, as we were just passing the biggest, proudest jewellery shop in the whole city, he said, carelessly, that we might go

in and look around a bit. Of course, I suspected what that meant, but I followed him in as demurely as possible.

We looked at all the conventional things—bow-knots and circles and crescents and bars, just like everybody wears—and then over at the side we found one case of odd things—the stones that are full of colour and light, the enamels and the wonderfully worked settings that might date from the time of Benvenuto Cellini, from the way they look. Such lovely, lovely things, with colours like flowers or butterflies or tropical moths, almost too rich and wonderful to wear. Finally I saw one thing that I had to exclaim over even more admiringly than the others, and Uncle Bob asked the salesman to take it out and show it to us.

It was an oval moonstone, full of silvery blue light that flickered and flamed and faded, and it was set in a frostlike tracery of platinum, with tiny diamonds and sapphires worked cunningly into it, to repeat and enhance the moonstone's colour. It swung on a thin chain of platinum with fairy knots of diamonds and sapphires, so small that you could hardly see them, but exquisite beyond anything that I can say. It didn't look as though mortals

had made it; but rather as if fairies and sprites had worked at it by moonlight, and shaped it with their little magic hands, laughing all the while.

While I was looking at it, almost afraid to take it up into my hands, it seemed so delicate, Uncle Bob slipped the price tag off it and very gently clasped it round my neck. "That is for a brave girl," he said, and then he gave the man a check and we came out into the sunlight again, both of us too near to tears to talk, and I with the loveliest necklace in the world for my very own.

I took hold of Uncle Bob's arm and gave it a tight squeeze. "I can't say thank you, Uncle Bob," I said, "but you know I'm thinking it."

"That's all I want, Leslie," said Uncle Bob.

We went to a very grand place for luncheon and had very grand things to eat, served by a waiter who was the superlative of grandness. We didn't talk very much, but I kept looking down at my pendant and then over into Uncle Bob's kind eyes, and I knew that not many girls were so fortunate as I.

When the crown prince disguised as a waiter had brought pink and white bonbons and the black coffee, Uncle Bob said, rather anxiously, I thought: "Leslie, how does work seem to you by this time?

Are you tired of earning your own living, or do you feel less bitter about it than you did when you first came?"

So I tried to tell him a little of what these months at work had meant to me. Of course, I couldn't pretend that it had all been pleasant, especially at first, when I was missing all the old life so much—but now, I loved it. Better than my loving it was that I felt that I had, partially at least, realized the things my dear father wanted me to realize.

Uncle Bob sat and listened very patiently, and interestedly, too, I think. Once he gave a quick sigh of satisfaction. He was glad for me, too.

"And when I get all my money, Uncle Bob," I said, at the end of my story, "I'm not going to quit work; but I'm going to go right on, and every time I see a girl who could earn a lot more money by just a little more training, or a year more in school, I'm going to see that she gets it; and every time I see a girl who needs a vacation very much, or who ought to go to the doctor but doesn't because she can't afford it; or who needs just fun, like music or theatres or good times, I'm going to see that she gets just what she needs. It'll be the nicest thing in the world to do with money. I'm so glad I'm going to be rich!"

Uncle Bob had been listening to my words very tolerantly, just as older people always listen to the wild, quixotic schemes of younger ones. But when I said with so much emphasis that I was so glad I was going to be rich, something quite different came into his face—an expression I'd never seen there before.

"Do you want so much to be rich?" he asked slowly, and not a bit in his usual voice.

I sat there staring at him across the table—he made me feel very strange somehow, and then—in a sudden flash of telepathy or intuition, call it what you like, I exclaimed, "Why—what is it, Uncle Bob? What do you mean? I *am* rich, or I will be? Didn't Father leave me a great deal of money?"

Then, after a second's pause, in which he did not try to answer, but just sat looking at me in that strange way, I went on: "Tell me—don't try to hide things from me. Surely I've a right to know! Have I been mistaken all these years—have I?"

So that was how the truth finally came out. He never would have told me then if I had not divined it, though sooner or later I would have had to know it. But now I learned it all. It was as I had vaguely guessed when he didn't respond to my Lady Bountiful romancing—*I was not rich at all!*

When my father died they found that he had made some very bad investments, and all these years Uncle Bob had held them and financed them, hoping that eventually they might be worth what my father thought they would be. But now all hope of that had gone, and though Uncle Bob had saved what he could out of the wreckage, there wasn't much. He had not told me, because all along he thought that there might be the chance of wealth ultimately in the things—they were mostly mines—but time had proved that there was nothing in them except loss.

All these years it had been Uncle Bob who had supported me, it was Uncle Bob's money I had spent. And Mrs. Alex was party to this loving conspiracy, too. No wonder she had always refused to let me pay for my share in the living expenses—she knew how little I had. Oh, how good they had been—how kind! I knew in my heart that I wasn't worth it.

The plan that I should earn my own living had been my father's—that was true—but he had left it to Uncle Bob's discretion whether or not it should be carried out. And Uncle Bob, because he feared I might be angry and hurt and do something unwise when I found out that I was not an heiress but a little beggar living on his bounty, had carried it out, for he

felt that if I knew I could earn my own living it would give me a feeling of power and independence, in spite of my being poor.

All this he told me over the luncheon table, very haltingly and shamefacedly, as though he was ashamed of being found out in so much kindness, as I believe he was.

And to think how many times I had thought him stingy with me, and I couldn't understand why he wouldn't let me spend money which was rightfully mine. I had called him unjust and arbitrary to myself a thousand times. And how many times I had teased him to give me a larger allowance, and how many bills I had run up—when Mrs. Alex wasn't with me—for him to pay. I tried to ask him to forgive me for all my thoughtlessness and extravagance, and he only said that I wasn't to blame, when I didn't know any better.

He went on to tell me, too, that I would be provided for if he should die—but not very lavishly, for he had others to think of besides me. I knew that one of Uncle Bob's sisters had married a worthless sort of a man, and had half-a-dozen children, and that Uncle Bob supported the whole family, and I had looked down on them and been very scornful

because they accepted so much—I, who was unknowingly accepting so much more, for I had not even the claim of kinship upon him! What a mean little pig I had been! Oh, humble pie was the last course of that luncheon, all right.

As we went out into the Avenue again, and I was feeling dazed and a little sad, too, I'm afraid, Uncle Bob put his hand over mine. "You know, Leslie," he said hesitatingly, "your father was my friend—and he left you in my care. You mustn't feel under any obligation to me, or mind what I have done for you—any more than you would have felt to your father. To me—to me—well—it's just the same as if you were my own daughter. I want you to feel that way, always."

I did feel it, too. And I answered him as well as I could and with all my heart, but I found that I was embarrassing him awfully, so I soon stopped. But I made a little vow to be a real daughter to Uncle Bob, and never anything less.

"Please tell me, Uncle Bob, if you don't mind," I asked, after we had got a little farther away from our emotions, "why you told me that you'd not let me have my money until I was twenty-five if I married Ranny Heeth? I don't understand why, if

there wasn't any money, you didn't tell me just that and settle it once and for all."

Uncle Bob looked down at me with a twinkle in his eyes. "I didn't want to break up your romance and your belief in your fortune all at once, Leslie," he said. "I knew if young Heeth thought you couldn't get at your money for six years that he wouldn't want to marry you, for he was in all sorts of financial difficulties, as I happened to know; still, if he'd persisted, I would have told the whole truth then sooner than see you tied for life to that worthless rascal. I wouldn't have told you now—about the money, I mean—if you hadn't guessed. Still, I think it's just as well that you know."

"I'm glad I know," I told him. "But it's a kind of a—a jolt," I added to myself.

Yes, it was a jolt. Even with Uncle Bob being so dear and kind and good and generous, I couldn't help feeling chagrined and hurt inside. All my nice purry thoughts about being a benefactress, and helping other girls so graciously looked pretty foolish in the light of the truth. Of course, I was in no sense any worse off for knowing, but it isn't pleasant to find out that you're not much more than a pauper when you've been used to thinking of yourself as a

sort of princess, and nothing can make it pleasant, no, not even an Uncle Bob.

There was just one thing that seemed necessary and desirable and permanently peaceful, and that was to get back to my desk and to my cross, untidy Mr. Kennedy. There, at least, was something that couldn't change while I was looking at it, as everything else seemed to do. Why, just see—I started off to Washington on an errand that seemed simple enough, and it changed into a wild adventure with kidnappers and isolated farmers, and telegrams to the Chief of Police. I had thought I was an heiress who could masquerade as a working girl for a little while, and, lo, and behold, I'd been living on the bounty of one to whom I'm not even kin. So it seemed that the only thing left was my work—*that* couldn't magic itself into something quite different from what it seemed.

Ah—but couldn't it!

The next morning I went back to it, very gladly. Mrs. O'Malley and George met me at the door—they had been watching for me, they said. A joyful, rousing welcome they gave me, both of them trying to tell me at once what they would have done to the kidnappers if they had only been there, and both of

them as solicitous and kind as though I belonged to them. I almost felt as though I did, they were such dears.

Finally, when their greetings were over and their questions were answered, I got away from them, back to my own little office. It seemed as though I'd been away a long, long time. I hung up my hat and coat and sat down at my desk and opened it, and gave my typewriter a little pat. There were letters to look over, papers, some bills, a lot of things that I'd bundled up and thrust into one of the desk drawers untouched on the day I left. I took them all out and began to go over them. But I had hardly read the first one when the door behind me opened. It was Mr. Kennedy.

"Now, look here," he began, "this isn't right. I sent word to you that you were not to come back until you were able to work." His tone was quite injured.

"But I do feel like work," I protested; "I'm all right again—I *want* to go to work. Another day of idleness wouldn't have agreed with me at all."

He stood about for a while, fiddled with some things on the file cases, and opened and shut a book that was lying on the little table near by.

"Did you like the flowers?" he burst out desperately at last.

"The flowers?" I asked in astonishment. "Oh, did *you* send them?"

"Yes," he said; "yes. Who did you think sent them?"

"I thought Uncle Bob did," I said frankly. "Why—they were beautiful—I—I loved them. I'm sorry I didn't know—but there wasn't any card—and—I never—never thought of you sending them. I do beg your pardon," I went stammering on, making it worse every second.

Suddenly he shut the book with a snap and turned around where he could face me. "Yes, I sent them," he said, "I'm an awful ass about saying things and I—I thought—maybe the flowers would tell you a little—a little——" He paused.

"A little what?" I asked, as much confused as he.

"Hang it!" he fairly shouted, "I'm in love with you—don't you see it? I fell in love with you the very first second when you walked in here and answered my questions so stiffly and starchily. And I've been in love with you ever since, makin' an ass of myself every time I opened my mouth to say anything to you, I dare say. I couldn't imagine

what was the matter with me at first—but I found out soon enough. The trouble was—to make you see—and you were so standoffish and—and—anyway, I never could talk to girls. Never could bear 'em. Except you." He stopped; then went on again, more slowly: "I don't suppose you could care anything about me—I'm such a raw sort—but if you could, Leslie—if you just think you could—even a little bit—I'd wait—I'd try to be more like other chaps——" He stopped again.

He looked so eager and so wistful—and so funny, too, in his laboratory apron, with his red hair sticking every way! But I didn't want to laugh. I wasn't sure what I did want to do—until he put his hands on mine. Then I knew—and I said, surprised and not surprised at all: "Why, I've been loving you, too, Ewan, all the time!"

Then, when he would have put his arms around me. "Wait—wait," I cried, holding him away, "there's one thing I've got to ask you. Ewan—*who is Daisy ?*"

"Daisy?" he said, looking puzzled, and not in the least conscience stricken or guilty. "Daisy who?"

"That's what I want to know," I told him. "After the explosion, in the laboratory, you know, when

George and I had dragged you out and he had gone for the doctor and I was watching beside you and trying to revive you, you—well, when you began to come to, you said 'Daisy!' And I want to know who she is."

And at that Ewan flung his head back and laughed and laughed and laughed. "I always used to call my sister Margaret 'Daisy' when we were youngsters," he said; "Daisy's the English nickname for Margaret, you know. And honest and true, she's the only girl named Daisy I ever knew. I don't know why I should have called her name when I'd been blown to bits—but that's the whole story. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, I am," I admitted. And oh, wasn't I glad that it was his sister and nobody else! It was an enormous weight off my mind. I'd worried such a lot about that girl.

"If you're satisfied," said Ewan, coming nearer, "I suppose you don't mind if I—if I——"

"No, I don't," I said.

So he kissed me.

It seems as though we shall never get through telling each other things. I wanted to know just

how he felt when he found I had disappeared, and whether it was the very first second he saw me that he fell in love with me, and if he had ever cared about any other girl, and whether he thinks his mother and sister—"Daisy"—will like me, and a million more important things. And Ewan wants to know how soon I will marry him, and whether I ever cared about any one else (I told him no, for I didn't *really* love Ranny Heeth), and what kind of a ring I would like for an engagement ring, and he had to tell me about the terrible rage and despair that fell on him when he found that I had been kidnapped, and how he made up his mind to tell me he loved me the first instant he had me alone if he ever got me back, and how his mother and sister will be crazy about me—and so on—and so on—and so on—to an indefinite but intensely happy length.

There's one thing we're going to do—we're going to have the Blue Envelope framed and hung on our library wall. It seems a pity it is blue. It *ought* to be Rose Colour!

THE END

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